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Letter dated 13 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for the period 11–13 August 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Safronkov**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

18-13545 (E) 200818 200818

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Annex to the letter dated 13 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (11 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 19 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 10 in Aleppo, 8 in Ladhiqiyah and 1 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported three incidents of gunfire: two in Hama Governorate and one in Idlib Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,891 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,893.76 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to five residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 87,664 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (12 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 24 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 13 in Ladhiqiyah, 9 in Aleppo and 2 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has not reported any incidents of gunfire.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out one humanitarian operation.

Near to Uwaynat al-Kabirah, Aleppo Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed as humanitarian aid.

In total, 1,892 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,896.56 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to seven residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 87,671 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (13 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 27 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 12 in Aleppo, 10 in Ladhiqiyah and 4 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported one incident of gunfire in Idlib Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out one humanitarian operation.

In Salihiyah, Dar'a Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 3.7 tons were distributed as humanitarian aid.

In total, 1,893 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,899.36 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 10 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 87,681 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/769

Security Council

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17 August 2018
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Letter dated 15 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for 14 and 15 August 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Safronkov**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

18-13679 (E) 220818 220818

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Annex to the letter dated 15 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (14 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 13 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 8 in Aleppo, 4 in Ladhiqiyah and 1 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported four incidents of gunfire: three in Idlib Governorate and one in Ladhiqiyah Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out one humanitarian operation.

In Hirjillah camp, Damascus Governorate, 860 food parcels with a total weight of 3.7 tons were distributed.

In total, 1,894 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,903.06 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 60 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 87,741 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (15 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 17 incidents of gunfire: 9 in Aleppo Governorate and 8 in Ladhiqiyah Governorate.

The Turkish representative office has reported one incident of gunfire in Aleppo Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out one humanitarian operation.

In Tall al-Daman, Aleppo Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed.

In total, 1,895 humanitarian operations have been carried out.

The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,905.86 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 185 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 87,926 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/770

Security Council

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16 August 2018

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Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat

I. Introduction

1. In adopting its resolution 2253 (2015), the Security Council expressed its determination to address the threat posed to international peace and security by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) and associated individuals and groups. In paragraph 97 of the resolution, the Council requested that I provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution 2368 (2017), the Council requested that I continue to provide, every six months, strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the aforementioned threat, as well as the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

2. This is my seventh report on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security.[1] The report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,[2] in close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, other United Nations entities and international organizations.

3. The report points out that ISIL has continued to morph into a covert global network, with a weakened yet enduring core in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, regional affiliates in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and the complex challenge posed by its returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their families. Member States and the United Nations have continued to strengthen, refine and promote the effective use of tools and measures to address the evolving transnational threat posed by ISIL.

[1] See S/2016/92, S/2016/501, S/2016/830, S/2017/97, S/2017/467 and S/2018/80.

[2] The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities.

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II. Threat assessment

A. Overview of threat

4. By the end of 2017, ISIL had been defeated in Iraq and was in headlong retreat in the Syrian Arab Republic. In early 2018, the Syrian armed forces made further progress against ISIL around Damascus, but the group showed greater resilience in the east. The military momentum against ISIL increased again in the late spring.[3]

5. Many ISIL fighters, planners and senior figures have been killed, and many personnel have left the immediate conflict zone. Many, however, remain in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, some still fully engaged militarily and others concealed in sympathetic communities and urban areas. The current ISIL membership in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is estimated at more than 20,000, split fairly evenly between the two countries. Among these is still a significant component of thousands of active foreign terrorist fighters.[4]

6. While the so-called "caliphate" has suffered attrition of its leadership and bureaucracy, and some delegation of authority has been unavoidable, collective discipline is intact. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi[5] remains in charge, although some reports suggest that he may have been injured. The general security and finance bureaux and the immigration and logistics coordination office of ISIL continue to function, as does its Amaq news outlet. Media activity slumped in September–October 2017, but has since recovered somewhat and stabilized. The balance of media activity has moved from the ISIL core to the affiliates. The group's propaganda remains weaker than it was up until mid-2017.[6]

7. The flow of foreign terrorist fighters towards ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic has essentially come to a halt. The reverse flow, although slower than anticipated, remains a serious challenge. ISIL relocators appear to be hiding wherever they can, with the intent to become active again when circumstances allow. The temporary stabilization of the group's military position in the east of the Syrian Arab Republic in early 2018 may have encouraged significant numbers of foreign terrorist fighters to remain in the conflict zone.[7]

8. There has been a decrease in the frequency of ISIL-directed terrorist attacks, which began late in 2017 and continued into 2018. There may be a causal connection between this and the military defeat of ISIL. The planned mergers of some bureaucratic units were not accomplished without disruption. Many of the most active terror-planners and operatives were killed in targeted strikes.[8]

9. The ISIL core is likely to survive in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic in the medium term owing to the ongoing conflict and complex stabilization challenges. Meanwhile, significant numbers of ISIL-affiliated fighters also exist in Afghanistan, South-East Asia, West Africa and Libya, and to a lesser extent in Sinai, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel. The foreign terrorist fighter component of these varies and is largest in Afghanistan (see S/2018/466). There are also small cells in other countries and regions. The rising threat from this global network will be diverse and hard to

[3] Information provided by a Member State.
[4] Information provided by a Member State.
[5] Listed as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai (QDi.299).
[6] Information provided by a Member State.
[7] Information provided by a Member State.
[8] Information provided by a Member State.

predict, and may even manifest itself if ISIL members leave the organization and join other networks.[9]

10. About a thousand foreign terrorist fighters are now detained in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic. Up to 10,000 are in the custody of the Government of Iraq (far more if their family members are counted). Some of the women and children who left the conflict zone and are now detained may have been victims of trafficking and sexual slavery at the hands of ISIL. Member States assess that trafficking in persons and sexual slavery have never been significant sources of income for ISIL, but they lack hard information on other aspects of the issue.

11. Archaeological sites in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic continue to be subject to illegal excavation and destruction since the competent authorities are unable to supervise all such locations.[10] ISIL likely generated funding by trafficking in cultural artefacts while at the peak of its territorial control, but it is difficult to assess whether it has stored such objects or is otherwise still able to profit from them.

12. ISIL can easily obtain arms and materiel in areas with weak governance where it is active. It excels in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices and in the weaponization of drones (see S/2018/14, para. 90). Member States assess that one of the dangers posed by returned foreign terrorist fighters is this kind of expertise garnered in conflict areas. Use of improvised explosive devices is likely to grow as ISIL further reverts to asymmetric tactics.

B. Regional trends

1. Middle East

13. ISIL is still evolving from a proto-State structure into a covert network. It no longer controls any significant urban centres, but for now has been able to hold on to territory in the eastern part of the Syrian province of Dayr al-Zawr, where it still dominates some small towns and villages. Its main concentration of fighters, including the remaining foreign terrorist fighters, is on the eastern side of the Middle Euphrates River Valley, and it holds strategically significant ground near the border with Iraq.[11] ISIL is still able to mount attacks inside Syrian territory. It does not fully control any territory in Iraq, but remains numerous and active.

14. ISIL has decentralized its leadership structure to mitigate further losses. Member States assess that many ISIL members intend to continue fighting despite the casualties they have suffered. Others are now hiding in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and other countries in the region, representing a potential threat within those countries and beyond. Some have been arrested by Syrian government forces or detained by other armed entities engaged in fighting ISIL.

15. ISIL remains present in other parts of the Syrian Arab Republic, including in Aleppo.[12] The Rukban camp in the south of the country holds about 80,000 internally displaced persons, densely packed in a small geographical area. Some Member states expressed concern at a risk of radicalization and recruitment in the camp, where new ISIL cells could emerge. The ISIL-aligned Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Waleed (QDe.155) is in Dar'a, in the far south-west.[13] On 25 July 2018, ISIL carried out multiple attacks, including suicide bombings, in civilian-populated areas in As Suwayda in the

[9] Information provided by a Member State.
[10] Information provided by a Member State.
[11] Information provided by a Member State.
[12] Information provided by a Member State.
[13] Information provided by a Member State.

south-west, reportedly killing and injuring more than 200 people and abducting women and children.

16. The finances of ISIL are harder to analyse now that its administrative functions have gone underground and it no longer attempts to administer people and territory. Its financial reserves have shrunk but not evaporated, and one Member State estimates them in the low hundreds of millions of United States dollars. By early 2018 ISIL had lost the ability to extract hydrocarbons (see S/2018/14/Rev.1, para. 9), but a decrease in the pace of military operations against it allowed it to regain access to some oil fields in the east of the Syrian Arab Republic.[14] As a result, oil remains a source of revenue for the group. It uses rudimentary methods to extract oil, both for its own consumption and for sale to locals. Other sources of revenue include extortion of oil distribution networks, "taxing" of commerce in areas it controls as well as contested areas, and kidnapping of local businessmen for relatively modest ransom payments in local currency.[15]

17. Despite the damage to the quasi-State bureaucratic structures of ISIL, systematic financial direction still emanates from its core leadership.[16] ISIL members have reportedly invested in the region and infiltrated businesses, such as construction companies, money exchanges[17] and agricultural, fisheries and real estate ventures, including hotels (see S/2018/14/Rev.1, paras. 12 and 13). There is concern about ISIL financial facilitators and networks moving their operations to nearby countries.[18]

18. ISIL is still able to channel funds across borders, often through intermediate countries, to their final destination. They rely primarily on hawala networks and money service businesses (some aware of the ISIL link, others not), as well as cash couriers.[19] Furthermore, the ISIL core appears to continue to support its affiliates financially, although the extent of this support is unclear and may be decreasing.[20]

19. In Yemen, sectarian polarization stimulated by the war with the Houthis attracted some recruits to ISIL. Member States report, however, that ISIL only commands 250 to 500 members in Yemen, who focus mainly on Yemeni and United Arab Emirates official targets. The group's violent extremist ideology and brutality do not appear to facilitate recruitment among the Yemeni population, and it is much weaker than Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

2. Africa

(a) North Africa

20. The ISIL presence in Libya persists in the form of cells around Tripoli, Misrata and Sabratah in the west, Ghat and Al Uwainat in the south and Ajdabiya and Darnah in the east. Estimates of ISIL numbers in the country vary between 3,000 and 4,000 individuals, strengthened by the movement of some foreign terrorist fighters from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Insecurity in Libya creates safe havens for terrorists, which in turn affect neighbouring countries. Foreign terrorist fighters of North African origin, especially, pose a wider threat in the region, increasing the operational capacity of local terrorist networks which they join, be they affiliated with ISIL or not.

[14] Information provided by a Member State.
[15] Information provided by a Member State.
[16] Information provided by a Member State.
[17] See, for example, the Narrative Summary of Reasons for Listing of Al-Kawthar Money Exchange (QDe.157).
[18] Information provided by a Member State.
[19] Information provided by a Member State.
[20] Information provided by a Member State.

21. It is reported that funding for these networks is derived from extortion of local populations, kidnapping for ransom and taxing of smuggling routes of all varieties. However, there is still no evidence that terrorists in North Africa are directly involved in trafficking of drugs or persons.[21]

22. ISIL elements are present in the mountainous areas in western Tunisia. In April 2018, the Tunisian Armed Forces eliminated several ISIL sleeper cells around Kasserine.[22] The ISIL-affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis is assessed by some Member States to have up to 1,000 fighters in North Sinai, Egypt. Military operations were launched against it in February 2018, and are ongoing.

23. ISIL continues publicly to threaten electoral processes in North Africa, but its only notable success has been its attack on the Libyan election commission in Tripoli in May 2018, in which 13 people died.[23]

(b) West Africa

24. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is mostly active at the Mali-Niger border.[24] ISGS has a lesser footprint than Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), the Al-Qaida-affiliated coalition of regional terrorist groups[25] that launched attacks and propaganda against French, United States of America and other international interests during the first half of 2018.[26] But ISGS shares the JNIM goal of destabilizing the Sahel and preventing the normalization of life so as to maintain freedom of movement in the north and access to smuggling routes.[27] Current pressure on ISGS, and the lack of support from the ISIL core, may generate closer cooperation with JNIM, but not a merger.[28] In Burkina Faso, one Ansarul Islam faction identifies with ISGS.[29]

25. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) is much larger than ISGS and is the dominant group in the Lake Chad Basin. It kidnapped 111 schoolgirls from the Nigerian town of Dapchi on 18 February 2018 and released them on 21 March 2018 in exchange for a large ransom payment. Given its size and now its financial resources, ISWAP is assessed to pose the main ISIL threat in West Africa.[30]

(c) East Africa

26. The ISIL affiliate in Somalia remains weak, with limited resources and capabilities. Despite its current constraints, ISIL continues to pursue its strategic intent of expanding its presence in Somalia. A Member State noted that Abdikadir Mumin (not listed), the ISIL leader in Puntland, has been in discussion with local fighters regarding his intention to consolidate existing cells and win over local fighters. Member States assess that, despite the current difficulties facing ISIL, Somalia presents a conducive option for future operations.

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[21] Information provided by a Member State.
[22] Information provided by a Member State.
[23] Remarks of Ghassan Salamé, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, to the Security Council, 21 May 2018.
[24] Information provided by a Member State.
[25] The groups are in the coalition are Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (QDe.014), Ansar Eddine (QDe.135), Al Mourabitoun (QDe.141) and the Macina Liberation Front (see S/2018/14/Rev.1, para. 32).
[26] Information provided by a Member State.
[27] Information provided by a Member State.
[28] Information provided by a Member State.
[29] Information provided by a Member State.
[30] Information provided by a Member State.

27. The financing streams for ISIL in Somalia are limited, and its initial tactic of attacking and taking over supply points, including ports, is no longer feasible. The group has therefore turned to criminal activities such as robbery to supplement the limited support it receives from ISIL in Yemen in the form of cash, small arms and light weapons (see S/2018/14, para. 42).

28. Some Member States in the region reported movement of foreign terrorist fighters from their territories into Somalia, and relocators from other conflict zones attempting to transit their territories by exploiting the existing porous borders. Additionally, Member States reported that ISIL conducted recruitment and radicalization in East Africa mainly through its presence online.

3. Europe

29. Member State authorities in Europe remained concerned about the terrorist threat in early 2018, although the tempo of attacks and disrupted plots was lower than in 2017. Much terrorist activity involved individuals with criminal records but no serious prior security traces. The attacks tended to use cheap, unsophisticated methods, such as knives and vehicles, but were of high impact because they targeted crowded civilian areas. There was also increased use or attempted use of triacetone triperoxide explosives.[31]

30. ISIL continues to urge its supporters in Europe, through social media, to mount attacks in their country of residence. The 2018 FIFA World Cup became a focus for propaganda seeking to provoke attacks by lone individuals or small groups during the tournament. ISIL continues to disseminate various attack methodologies, as well as instructions for creating bombs and explosive vests. The recent trend has been away from directed and enabled attacks towards inspired attacks, an apparent result of the attrition of the group's external operations capabilities. Nevertheless, ISIL has recently manifested an interest in more sophisticated attacks, including ones using chemicals or remotely controlled improvised explosive devices.[32]

31. Member States noted that flows of returnees and relocators from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic had not materialized to the degree expected, but the vast majority of those who had successfully left the conflict zone had returned home rather than relocating elsewhere. Measures taken by Member States that had largely prevented further travel to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic had created a different problem, with aspiring foreign terrorist fighters becoming "frustrated travellers". ISIL had thousands of such supporters who were active online and represented recruitment opportunities for terrorist networks. Despite the weakening of the ISIL core and the reduced quality of its propaganda, the high volume of commercially encrypted messages still had a significant enabling effect in the spheres of radicalization, recruitment and instruction.[33]

32. Radicalization in European prisons is a growing concern for the authorities. Meanwhile, some of those convicted years ago for terrorist offenses are now coming up for release, and some plots hatched in prison have already been foiled. On 29 May 2018, a radicalized inmate took the opportunity of temporary release to kill two police officers and a bystander in the Belgian city of Liège.[34]

33. Member States highlighted the complex challenge posed by female returnees from conflict zones. While many women were confined to the household and some were victims of sexual slavery, some actively participated in the recruitment of new

[31] Information provided by a Member State.
[32] Information provided by a Member State.
[33] Information provided by a Member State.
[34] Information provided by a Member State.

fighters on social media, some received weapons training and some took part in the fighting. Returning children posed an even more complex challenge for law enforcement and social services, and it was unclear what threat they might pose. The background and nationality of some children born in conflict zones are unclear. Many were exposed to violent extremist ideologies, some took part in propaganda videos and some were involved in fighting and violence.

4. Central and South Asia

34. In Afghanistan, ISIL continued attempts to expand its presence, despite pressure from the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, the international coalition and the Taliban. While the group's strongest presence is currently in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar, it is also active in Jowzjan and other provinces in the north. It has reach into Kabul and more widely, and has committed disruptive, high-profile sectarian atrocities, as well as attacks against both Government and Taliban targets during the Eid al-Fitr ceasefire.[35]

35. As discussed in the ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (see S/2018/466, sect. III), the numerical strength of ISIL in Afghanistan, and the nature of the external threat potentially emanating from its presence there, have been the subject of much discussion among Member States. There has not been any new consensus of Member State information to significantly alter the key judgments in that report, to the effect that ISIL has about 4,000 members in Afghanistan, including up to 1,000 in northern Afghanistan (with both numbers probably increasing steadily); that its leader in Afghanistan is Abu Sayed Bajauri (not listed) in Nangarhar; that most of its members and leaders were formerly members of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (QDe.132); and that it may represent a potential threat to the Member States of Central Asia.

36. According to one Member State, some recent plots detected and disrupted in Europe originated from ISIL in Afghanistan. Another Member State reported that ISIL in Afghanistan had been responsible for at least one attack in Kashmir. Apart from establishing presences across Afghanistan, ISIL maintains the objective of damaging the interests of other countries in the region.

37. The terrorist threat projecting from Afghanistan into Central Asia is perceived to be growing. Increasing numbers of foreign terrorist fighters are relocating from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic to Afghanistan, bringing with them skills in handling weaponry and improvised explosive devices and knowledge of military tactics. Some of them have connections with criminal groups. Central Asian fighters tend to feel most comfortable relocating among Afghans of Uzbek and Tajik ethnicity.[36]

5. South-East Asia

38. Indonesia was afflicted in May 2018 with a wave of deadly attacks. Members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah,[37] an ISIL-linked local network of cells whose spiritual leader is Oman Rochman (QDi.407), took the unprecedented step of using their whole families in three operations.[38] On 13 May, a family of six, including a 9-year-old girl, carried out three suicide bombings against churches in Surabaya, while on 14 May a family of five set off two motorcycle bombs at the entrance to the local police headquarters in Surabaya, killing all of the bombers except for an 8-year-old girl.[39]

[35] Information provided by a Member State.
[36] Information provided by a Member State.
[37] See S/2018/14/Rev.1, para. 56 and S/2017/573, para. 62.
[38] Information provided by a Member State.
[39] Information provided by a Member State.

Another family of six was constructing bombs in nearby Sidoarjo on 13 May, when one bomb prematurely detonated and left two of the family members dead.[40] ISIL claimed responsibility for the successful attacks through its Amaq news outlet, but seems not to have played any direct role in them. However, it is understood that the three families were at least acquainted with one another.[41] Member States are concerned that ISIL may be adopting a new modus operandi of using families, including women[42] and children, as suicide bombers.

39. In the Philippines, in spite of losses suffered by ISIL-linked groups during the 2017 siege of Marawi City (see S/2018/14/Rev.1, paras. 58 and 59), the terrorist threat remains acute in Mindanao. Remnants of the network are reported to be regrouping, reactivating training camps and recruiting hundreds of followers from both inside and outside the Philippines.[43] Furthermore, the post-Marawi arrests of suspected foreign terrorist fighters who were not South-East Asian, some of whom travelled to the Philippines using stolen or false documents and/or broken travel routes, indicate that the southern Philippines continues to be a destination and transit point for foreign terrorist fighters from outside the region. The opportunity the area offers for militants to engage in combat, and the local availability of firearms, contribute to this phenomenon.[44]

40. The local ISIL affiliate, known as ISIL-Philippines or Daulah Islamiyah, includes several groups, among them the Basilan-based branch of the Abu Sayyaf Group (QDe.001).[45] However, following the death of Isnilon Totoni Hapilon (QDi.204) in Marawi, the affiliation of that group with ISIL is less clear, as many members have disassociated themselves from ISIL and concentrated more on criminal activities to raise funds, rather than on ideology.[46] As of July 2018, no replacement for Hapilon as the overall leader of ISIL in South-East Asia had been identified.[47]

41. Recent Member State designations have highlighted the role of intermediaries in the ISIL network in South-East Asia for financing, procurement of weapons and training, and also demonstrated connections among regional players, as well as between regional operatives and the ISIL core.[48] For example, intermediaries have facilitated financial transfers from the ISIL core to affiliates in the Philippines and arranged explosives and firearms training for Jamaah Ansharut Daulah recruits from Indonesia at camps in the Philippines. ISIL affiliates in the Philippines may still have access to the millions of dollars which they looted from banks and homes in Marawi.[49]

[40] Information provided by a Member State.
[41] Information provided by a Member State.
[42] Previously, would-be female suicide bombers had been arrested in Indonesia. See Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Mothers to bombers: the evolution of Indonesian women extremists", 31 January 2017.
[43] Information provided by a Member State.
[44] Information provided by a Member State.
[45] Information provided by a Member State.
[46] Information provided by a Member State.
[47] Information provided by a Member State.
[48] United States Department of the Treasury, "Treasury sanctions ISIS-Philippines facilitator for terror support", 30 April 2018; and "Treasury Sanctions ISIS facilitators across the globe," 9 February 2018.
[49] Information provided by a Member State.

III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat

A. Overview

42. Since my previous report (S/2018/80), the United Nations, Member States and international, regional and subregional organizations have continued to strengthen, refine and promote the effective use of tools and measures to address the evolving threat posed by ISIL, including its affiliates and supporters and returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

43. The report I submitted to the General Assembly on 20 April 2018 in accordance with Assembly resolution 70/291 (A/72/840) provides a detailed account of the activities undertaken by the United Nations system from 2016 to early 2018 to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

44. Continued efforts have been made to strengthen the coherence, coordination and effectiveness of United Nations counter-terrorism efforts. On 23 February 2018, I signed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (see A/72/840, annex III) as an agreed framework with the heads of the United Nations entities, as well as the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization, to strengthen common action in the counter-terrorism work of the United Nations system.

45. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2395 (2017), the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism prepared a joint report affirming their close partnership in supporting Member States in their implementation of the international counter-terrorism framework and setting out practical steps to be taken to ensure the incorporation of the Executive Directorate's recommendations and analysis in the provision of technical assistance by the Office of Counter-Terrorism. The joint report was considered by the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee and the General Assembly (see S/2018/435 and A/72/840).

46. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate have also strengthened their cooperation through joint high-level bilateral consultations in regions most affected by terrorism and violent extremism, aimed at enhancing the visibility of their activities and galvanizing support from technical assistance providers and donors.

47. On 6 and 7 March 2018, the heads of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate conducted joint high-level bilateral consultations in Iraq, focusing on Iraq's progress in addressing the 16 priority capacity-building needs identified by the Counter-Terrorism Committee and endorsed by the Government of Iraq in 2015. A joint scoping mission, conducted from 1 to 3 May 2018, focused on specific capacity-building priorities.

48. From 29 April to 4 May 2018, the heads of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate visited Central Asia to review progress made pursuant to the joint plan of action on the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia and to explore potential areas of cooperation with Member States of the region in the plan's next phase. The Office of Counter-Terrorism will continue to cooperate closely with the Executive Directorate, including in follow-up to the Committee's assessment visit to all five States of Central Asia, to ensure that technical assistance delivery addresses the recommendations emerging from the visit and targets the priority needs of each State. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate jointly briefed the Counter-Terrorism Committee on their joint visit to Central Asia.

49. United Nations counter-terrorism bodies have also continued to prioritize their response to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon. In June 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in consultation with the Executive Directorate and working through the Working Group on Foreign Terrorist Fighters of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, completed the latest update of the capacity-building implementation plan for countering the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in accordance with Security Council resolution 2396 (2017). The current implementation plan consists of 40 projects, to be implemented by 12 United Nations entities. Over 20 of the 40 projects focus specifically on returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters.[50]

B. Countering the financing of terrorism

50. ISIL has continued to adapt its operational and financing methods. Its evolution from a territorial entity into a covert network has made the detection of funding flows more difficult. Consequently, there remains a need for Member States to strengthen their financial intelligence and their use of counter-financing of terrorism tools.

51. The heads of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate attended the international conference on combating the financing of Da'esh and Al-Qaida ("No Money for Terror") organized by the Presidency of France in Paris on 25 and 26 April 2018. The participants adopted a political road map for global counter-terrorism financing efforts in which they highlighted, inter alia, the need to provide greater support to States with identified strategic deficiencies in their implementation of counter-financing of terrorism standards, and acknowledged the role of the United Nations in that area.

52. In May 2018, the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) held a special session on countering the financing of terrorism, pursuant to a recommendation of the Executive Directorate. The session highlighted the challenges faced by GIABA member States in effectively implementing counter-financing of terrorism measures and the importance of conducting a regional terrorism-financing risk assessment. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Executive Directorate are working with GIABA to address this need.

53. There remains a significant risk that new technologies and payment modalities will be abused for terrorism-financing purposes, particularly as some new financial instruments remain unregulated in many Member States. Within the framework of the assessment visits of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Executive Directorate continued to discuss with host Governments the risks associated with new financial instruments, including the online collection of funds. From 28 to 30 April 2018, the Executive Directorate participated in the plenary meeting of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force and briefed the Operational Experts Forum on Terrorist Financing established by the Task Force on the use of information and communications technology.

54. The Executive Directorate has continued to promote the introduction and effective implementation of asset-freezing mechanisms pursuant to Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). At the request of Tunisia, the Executive Directorate contributed to an expert workshop on mechanisms to freeze terrorist property and assets, organized by the European Union (within the framework of the counter-

[50] In accordance with resolution 2396 (2017), the updated version of the plan was communicated to Member States and relevant international, regional and subregional bodies. It is also available on the Network against Terrorism portal maintained by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, together with evaluation sheets for projects already completed under the plan.

terrorism in Middle East and North Africa countries project) and France. The Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism are now developing a joint initiative aimed at assisting Tunisia in the operationalization of its asset-freezing mechanism.

Organized crime

55. As highlighted by the Security Council in its presidential statement of 8 May 2018 (S/PRST/2018/9), the nexus between organized crime and terrorism remains a complex challenge. The Executive Directorate has devoted increasing attention to this nexus and to the potential involvement of terrorist groups in criminal activities to raise funds. Some visited States have noted a growing convergence between the funding activities of ISIL and those of organized criminal groups operating particularly in the Sahel and South-East Asia.

56. Acting in accordance with Security Council resolutions 2331 (2016) and 2388 (2017), the Executive Directorate has also enhanced its efforts to include the issue of trafficking in persons — where committed in support of terrorism, including for terrorism financing — in its dialogue with Member States, notably within the framework of assessment visits. In January 2018, the Executive Directorate joined the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, a policy forum mandated by the General Assembly to improve coordination among United Nations agencies and relevant international organizations to facilitate a holistic and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating trafficking in persons.

57. In view of the complexity of the subject and the limited information currently available, the Executive Directorate is studying the nexus between terrorism and human trafficking. In April 2018 the Executive Directorate sent a questionnaire to all Member States, through their permanent missions in New York, soliciting information on the links between the two phenomena. I encourage Member States who have not yet done so to respond to the questionnaire.

58. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continues to cooperate with international, regional and non-governmental organizations to strengthen the capacities of cultural heritage professionals and law enforcement authorities of conflict States and relevant concerned States to help prevent and counter the illicit trafficking of cultural property as a source of terrorism financing. This work includes initiatives to promote due diligence in art market transactions and the exchange of best practices in dealing with the exchange of cultural property, as well as the training of specialists in the fight against the looting of cultural artefacts and illicit trafficking in antiquities.

C. Border management and law enforcement

59. Security Council resolution 2396 (2017) introduced several new requirements for enhancing border security. Accordingly, the past six months have seen increased efforts to improve the use and responsible sharing of biometrics among relevant Member States, INTERPOL and other international bodies and to promote the introduction and implementation of passenger name records and advance passenger information systems.

60. The Executive Directorate has engaged systematically with Member States and international and regional organizations to assess the level of implementation of advance passenger information systems and to collect good practices in that regard. Thus far, 66 States have introduced measures requiring airlines to provide advance passenger information in accordance with the 2017 standard of the International Civil Aviation Organization on advance passenger information. However, few Member

States have the resources and capacity to effectively implement such systems. Further technical assistance will therefore be required to ensure wider usage of these technologies.

61. The Working Group on Border Management and Law Enforcement of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force has developed a compendium of recommended practices for the responsible use and sharing of biometrics in counter-terrorism.[51] The development of the compendium will be followed by a series of regional awareness-raising activities, funded by the Office of Counter-Terrorism in partnership with the Biometrics Institute, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, INTERPOL, UNODC and the private sector to support the efforts of Member States and regional organizations to use biometric data responsibly and in full compliance with international human rights law and standards.

62. Even though the continued development of advanced technologies to identify foreign terrorist fighters and other individuals linked to terrorism is encouraging, there remain many challenges, particularly with respect to the need to ensure that border-management strategies are comprehensive, human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive. These challenges have been significantly exacerbated by historic global forced displacement levels.[52]

63. From 11 to 13 June 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organized a regional workshop in South-East Asia as part of a training module for border-security officials on human rights in the context of counter-terrorism. Seven Member States participated in the workshop, which addressed several aspects of border security and management, including interception, immediate assistance, screening, interviewing, detention and return.

64. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by terrorist groups. It is important that Member States step up their efforts in this area, including by developing and implementing gender-sensitive training for border-security and law enforcement officials, increasing the number of women in border and law enforcement agencies, ensuring that adequate personnel and facilities are in place to provide tailored responses for female victims of terrorism, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2331 (2016), and ensuring more effective identification of female foreign terrorist fighters.

65. There remains a lack of data on persons excluded from refugee status because of suspected links to terrorism and on measures taken subsequent to their exclusion. This lack of data may impede analysis of the effectiveness of measures taken in such situations. There is also a need for Member States to develop standard operating procedures for the lawful collection of information on such cases and the lawful sharing of information with third States, in full compliance with international laws and standards.

66. The protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks remains a priority concern, particularly considering continuing attacks perpetrated by ISIL and its supporters against vulnerable targets. Since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2341 (2017), initiatives have been developed to identify good practices in this area and enhance the delivery of assistance to Member States. The Working Group on the Protection of Critical Infrastructure including Vulnerable Targets, Internet and Tourism Security of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force

[51] Available at www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Compendium-biometrics-final-version-LATEST_18_JUNE_2018_optimized.pdf.

[52] See www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

published in June 2018 a compendium of good practices for the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks.[53] The Executive Directorate has also engaged with the private sector on this issue, having notably co-chaired the related work of the World Economic Forum and promoted the need to protect critical infrastructure, both at the World Economic Forum and in the context of the work of the Asia information and communications technology counter-terrorism dialogue established by the Executive Directorate.

67. As noted in my previous report (see S/2018/80, para. 28), the continued dissemination of information through the Internet and social media on, inter alia, terror-attack methodologies and the construction of improvised explosive devices poses considerable challenges for law enforcement agencies. The use of improvised explosive devices by ISIL has caused death and injury to countless civilians and, as noted above (see para. 12), is likely to increase further. The United Nations is providing support to affected Member States in the area of mine action to mitigate the threat posed by improvised explosive devices. The United Nations Mine Action Service is currently assisting the Government of Iraq in rendering safe and removing such devices planted in the Old City of Mosul to facilitate recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

D. International judicial cooperation

68. Member States have continued to make progress in their efforts to strengthen international judicial cooperation. However, returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters continue to pose a significant challenge to criminal-justice systems. Prosecutors and investigators are increasingly required to handle complex cases that demand specialized knowledge of charity law, finance and information and communications technology, as well as an understanding of the range of special investigative techniques that are available, including when investigating and prosecuting sexual and gender-based violence, in full respect for the relevant international law and human rights obligations.

69. The Security Council requires Member States to strengthen their collection, handling, preservation and sharing of information and evidence (see Council resolution 2396 (2017), para. 20). In high-risk environments, such as conflict and post-conflict situations, civilian judicial and law enforcement practitioners often have limited capacity to conduct on-site investigations. Consequently, the military may play a critical role in the collection, preservation and lawful sharing of evidence. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, in cooperation with the members of the relevant working groups of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (The Hague), is developing United Nations guidelines that will include recommendations on ways to ensure that evidence collected by the military is admissible in court, including by ensuring chain of custody and full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law.

70. A further pressing issue for prosecutors engaged in mutual legal assistance is the need to request digital evidence from communications service providers, who are required to put in place appropriate procedures and mechanisms to swiftly reply to mutual legal assistance requests from Member States. The Executive Directorate, UNODC and the International Association of Prosecutors have continued to develop a practical guide to requesting and gathering electronic evidence, including from private communications service providers, having held two expert groups meetings

[53] Available at www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Compendium-CIP-final-version-120618_new_fonts_18_june_2018_optimized.pdf.

in Vienna, in February and June 2018, and an outreach event for the private sector, in the Silicon Valley region of the United States, in July 2018.

71. Exchange of information and the use of technology and databases play a key role in preventing terrorism. However, the collection, analysis, storage and sharing of data must be conducted in a human rights-compliant manner, including provisions for destruction of the data. All stakeholders must also ensure effective protection of information contained in relevant databases. Those included in such databases should be persons with respect to whom there are reasonable grounds to suspect involvement in terrorism, as defined in the international counter-terrorism instruments and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The inclusion of persons for improper reasons, such as their engagement in non-violent political activity, harms the overall integrity of counter-terrorism databases and undermines international cooperation.

72. In an effort to facilitate closer judicial cooperation, UNODC and the Executive Directorate have been collaborating on a project to promote the designation of central authorities and encourage their sharing of good practices. In June 2018, UNODC launched a dedicated database of contact points of competent national authorities, which aims to facilitate contact and lawful information-sharing in this area.

73. The continued failure to prosecute in cases of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, perpetrated by terrorist groups remains a major shortcoming. My 2018 report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250) documents horrific acts of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups and notes that, to date, not a single member of ISIL or Boko Haram has been prosecuted for offences of sexual violence. As emphasized in the report, there is an urgent need to develop national strategies for investigating and prosecuting sexual violence perpetrated by ISIL and its affiliates, which will require both political will and technical expertise.

74. Another challenging but critical area of cooperation relates to the intelligence services — both civilian and military — which can offer valuable insights into terrorist networks and groups, both on and off the battlefield. Intelligence services can play a crucial role in gathering evidence to prosecute terrorism-related crimes in instances where regular channels of judicial cooperation between criminal-justice actors no longer function, including within the framework of a conflict or other high-risk situation. Coordination and cooperation, through the establishment of fusion centres or through more informal cooperation mechanisms, can enhance understanding of the roles and needs of the intelligence and judicial communities. Robust oversight mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that such cooperation is in full compliance with human rights and rule-of-law standards.

E. Prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration

75. Foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members continued to return or relocate from conflict zones with various levels of experience. Member States have faced challenges in developing and implementing comprehensive risk assessments for such individuals and in taking appropriate action, including prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration measures that comply with domestic and international law and take into account gender and age sensitivities, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2396 (2017).

76. In view of the growing number of foreign terrorist fighters entering criminal-justice systems, the role of prisons in tackling this phenomenon remains crucial. In January 2018, UNODC, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate launched a joint project on "Supporting the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons". The project aims to strengthen prison safety and security, improve capacity in assessing

the risks and needs of violent extremist prisoners, enhance capacity of prison-based disengagement, and strengthen social reintegration, whether in the post-release context or through the provision of alternatives to imprisonment. UNODC is also developing guidelines on non-custodial measures for terrorism offences, including for FTF returnees.

77. An emerging challenge in this area is addressing the risks and needs of foreign terrorist fighters exiting the prison system. The number of such individuals is expected to rise over the coming months and years. There is a risk that imprisonment may delay the threat posed by such individuals, not reduced it.[54] In its engagement with Member States, the Executive Directorate has identified concerns relating to the appropriateness of existing risk-assessment and monitoring tools for such individuals, as well as the need to ensure that effective measures for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society are provided outside the prison setting. Member States have been engaged in developing and refining such tools and programmes, but more work will be required to evaluate their impact and identify good practices.

78. Even though both men and women returnees face various forms of stigmatization and marginalization, returning women who are imprisoned experience higher rates of physical and sexual abuse while in detention and, when exiting prison, may face particular challenges due to lack of economic opportunities, strained family ties, and stigmatization. It is therefore important that States develop and implement tailored and gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, both in and outside prison settings. Further efforts are required in this area.

79. Acting in accordance with resolution 2396 (2017), several States have introduced initiatives to provide rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for children associated with foreign terrorist fighters, in addition to adequate legal protections. However, some States have not yet adopted appropriate legal safeguards, norms or standards to protect and promote the human rights of children in such cases. Moreover, programmes aimed at preventing the recruitment and radicalization of children and at rehabilitating and reintegrating children are often limited in scope, duration and funding.

80. In June 2018, the Executive Directorate briefed the Counter-Terrorism Committee on its ongoing efforts to integrate the impact of terrorism on children and children's rights into its work, including in the context of country assessments. UNODC has published a handbook on children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups, which provides guidance for Member States on the role of the justice system in this context. UNODC is also implementing several technical assistance projects in this field.

81. The Office of Counter-Terrorism is developing a handbook to assist Member States in complying with international law, including human rights law and humanitarian law, in dealing with children accompanying or associated with individuals considered or suspected to be foreign terrorist fighters. An initial expert meeting was held in April 2018 in New York and a first regional consultative meeting will be held with Member States from South-East Asia in Jakarta on 30 and 31 July. The handbook will be finalized by the end of 2018 following two more consultative meetings.

Lake Chad Basin

82. UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued to support national initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin States aimed at strengthening criminal-justice responses to terrorism. From 27 February to 2 March

[54] https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CTED-Trends-Report-March-2018.pdf

2018, UNODC, the Executive Directorate and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a joint mission to Maiduguri, Nigeria, with the support of the Government of Nigeria and the European Union, to discuss the operationalization of the criminal justice action plan for north-east Nigeria adopted by the Government of Nigeria in December 2017. The discussions were complemented by a two-day inter-agency training workshop for the 20 members of the Joint Investigation Centre, which is responsible for the initial screening of persons associated with Boko Haram in Borno State.

83. In accordance with the requirements of Security Council resolutions 2349 (2017) and 2396 (2017), a regional conference on the screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of Boko Haram-associated persons in the Lake Chad Basin States was held in N'Djamena from 10 to 13 April 2018. The participants included representatives of the four Lake Chad Basin States, regional partners and United Nations entities, including the Executive Directorate and UNODC. During the conference, it was observed that differences in practices among Lake Chad Basin States could undermine the efficacy and sustainability of a regional approach. The conference reaffirmed the need for the Lake Chad Basin States to develop common elements and, where possible, common standards, in screening, prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating persons associated with Boko Haram.

84. A regional workshop for the Lake Chad Basin countries on coherent approaches to the screening and prosecution of Boko Haram-associated persons was organized by the Executive Directorate and UNODC in N'Djamena from 17 to 19 July 2018 and provided input to the pillar on screening, prosecution rehabilitation and reintegration of the regional stabilization strategy for the Lake Chad Basin. The strategy, initiated by the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, is currently being finalized and is expected to be adopted in August 2018.

F. Countering terrorist narratives and engaging communities

85. United Nations entities have continued to support initiatives aimed at fostering a holistic, whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach to countering violent extremism. Within the framework of its engagement with States on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Executive Directorate has noted a growing commitment to an inclusive approach to countering violent extremism that seeks to engage vulnerable communities and is conducted in partnership with civil society groups, educators, counsellors and experts. Some Governments have actively facilitated the work of non-governmental actors in this context, including by providing funding, rather than handling initiatives directly. In continuing their engagement in this area, States should ensure appropriate monitoring of the human rights impact of measures to counter violent extremism, particularly on women, children and various religious, cultural and ethnic communities.

86. Concluding a series of community-engagement workshops held by the Executive Directorate for Member States of South and South-East Asia, the Counter-Terrorism Committee held an informal meeting on 6 June 2018 focusing on the need for a whole-of-society approach in countering terrorism and violent extremism. The meeting was attended by Member States of South and South-East Asia, as well as civil society organizations working on countering violent extremism that leads to terrorism.

87. On 29 May 2018, the Executive Directorate organized an open meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee to review developments in the area of countering terrorist narratives in accordance with Security Council resolution 2354 (2017). The participating experts — including representatives of Governments, academia,

religious institutes, civil society organizations and the private sector — stressed the importance of whole-of-society approaches to countering terrorist narratives. The meeting highlighted the need to develop critical thinking and digital literacy among potential target audiences of terrorist propaganda and to ensure that counter-narratives reflect an understanding of causes of alienation. Even though removal of terrorist content from online platforms can sometimes be appropriate, it cannot substitute for nuanced counter-narratives in the long term.

88. The Executive Directorate has also continued its engagement with the research community, particularly through its Global Research Network, to identify and assess issues, trends and developments relating to the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. On 11 April 2018, the Executive Directorate launched a trends report on challenges posed by returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, which draws primarily on the work of Network members.[55]

89. The full inclusion and empowerment of women is crucial to the success of programmes to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism. On 10 and 11 April 2018, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States and the permanent secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel, with the support of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, co-hosted a high-level event on women, violence and terrorism in West Africa and the Sahel. The participants adopted the "Dakar Call for Action", in which they recommended that the States of West Africa and the Sahel take effective measures for the systematic involvement of women in all initiatives to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism, and that the international community and regional organizations provide substantial support for women's initiatives to address and prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism in the region.

90. On 18 July 2018, the Executive Directorate and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) held a joint symposium to discuss gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations, with a view to developing targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses, as requested by the Security Council in its resolutions 2242 (2015) and 2395 (2017).

91. Efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism must include young people. In April 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, together with the permanent missions of Norway and Pakistan, organized a panel discussion on the topic "Investing in youth to counter terrorism". The participants considered ways in which private companies, civil society organizations and other non-governmental actors can contribute to efforts to counter violent extremism that is conducive to terrorism and develop alternative pathways for young people.

92. Based on its guides for prevention of violent extremism programmes in education, UNESCO has conducted regional capacity-building activities for educational stakeholders and youth in the Lake Chad Basin, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, as well as in South-East Europe and Central Asia. On 25 April 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNESCO launched a joint project for the prevention of violent extremism through youth empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The project provides a framework for action to empower young women and men to be change-makers in their own communities and promote understanding, tolerance and peace in the Middle East and North Africa region.

93. United Nations entities have also engaged in promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue with a view to preventing violent extremism and atrocity

[55] www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CTED-Trends-Report-March-2018.pdf.

crimes. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect continued to engage with religious leaders on preventing atrocity crimes, in particular in the context of the implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.[56]

IV. Observations and recommendations

94. Despite the continued efforts of Member States to enhance implementation of a wide range of measures to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism, many challenges remain. Those challenges derive in particular from the ongoing transformation of ISIL from a territorial entity into a covert network, the activities of its regional affiliates and the threat posed by returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters. They also derive from the growing sophistication and technological complexity of the required measures, as well as the associated need for expertise and costly resources. In this context, the continued capacity of the United Nations system to assess implementation gaps, identify good practices and deliver the necessary technical assistance to Member States continues to be crucial.

95. In this context, I am encouraged by the successful outcome of the first-ever counter-terrorism week, held at United Nations Headquarters from 25 to 29 June 2018, which confirmed the shared resolve of Member States in the face of terrorism and their readiness to engage within and strengthen the framework of the United Nations. On 26 June, the General Assembly, through its resolution 72/284, reaffirmed by consensus the comprehensive approach and four mutually reinforcing pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It also agreed on significant updates in light of the evolving threat of terrorism, including in the areas of addressing returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their families, countering the financing of terrorism, countering terrorist narratives and protecting critical infrastructure.

96. Immediately after the review of the strategy, I convened on 28 and 29 June the first-ever United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States. One hundred and fifty Member States responded to my call to explore ways to strengthen multilateral cooperation and build new partnerships to address practical and operational counter-terrorism issues, including in the fight against ISIL. There was broad agreement that more needs to be done to share expertise and critical counter-terrorism information. Member States also highlighted the benefits of adopting a comprehensive and inclusive whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering terrorism, including civil society and fully engaging women and youth.

97. Counter-terrorism continues to be one of my highest priorities and I am committed to building on the successes of counter-terrorism week. Many of the proposed activities emerging from the discussions that week would strengthen the ways in which the United Nations helps Member States to counter the threat posed by ISIL, such as the establishment of a network of global counter-terrorism coordinators, the establishment of platforms for the more efficient provision of capacity-building assistance and the real-time sharing of information, and the organization of thematic regional events on countering and preventing terrorism and violent extremism.

[56] www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Plan%20of%20Action_Religious_Prevent-Incite-WEB-rev3.pdf.

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Developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2404 (2018), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) until 28 February 2019, and requested that I report every six months on the situation in Guinea-Bissau and on progress made in the implementation of the resolution and the mandate of UNIOGBIS. The report also provides an update on key political, security, human rights, socioeconomic and humanitarian developments in Guinea-Bissau since my report of 9 February 2018 (S/2018/110).

2. On 4 May, I announced the appointment of José Viegas Filho of Brazil as my new Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau and Head of UNIOGBIS, to succeed Modibo Touré of Mali, who completed his assignment on 6 May. My new Special Representative took up his functions in Bissau on 28 May.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

3. Since my previous report, there have been some encouraging signs of progress towards the resolution of the political impasse in Guinea-Bissau and the implementation of the Conakry Agreement on the Implementation of the ECOWAS Road Map for the Resolution of the Political Crisis in Guinea-Bissau. Following local facilitation efforts led by national religious figures, and acceding to pressure from leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), President José Mário Vaz finally appointed Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister of consensus, which led to the formation of an inclusive Government and the reconvening of the National Assembly in plenary session. Moreover, President Vaz formally set 18 November 2018 as the date of legislative elections. Notwithstanding those positive developments, the consensus among political actors remains fragile, and the process of organizing legislative elections in 2018 is facing serious technical and financial challenges. Since taking office in May, the inclusive Government of Prime Minister

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Gomes has delayed making important decisions on voter registration modalities, which has had repercussions for the timely procurement of biometric equipment to capture voter data. The indecisiveness of the new Government has cast doubt on its resolve to respect the timetable for the legislative elections to be held in November.

4. The ECOWAS decision, on 4 February, to impose sanctions on 19 Bissau-Guineans for impeding the implementation of the Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016 faced limited public opposition, except from those concerned. On 13 February, the previous Government issued a statement describing the sanctions as "abusive", in conflict with the governing principles of ECOWAS and detrimental to the Constitution and laws of Guinea-Bissau. The statement further declared that the Government would call for an extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government to review the Conakry Agreement and to seek the appointment of a "new, independent and impartial mediator" interested in assisting Guinea-Bissau in overcoming the political stalemate.

5. On 20 February, a lawyer representing the 19 individuals on the ECOWAS sanctions list submitted a petition to the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé of Togo, requesting the suspension of sanctions on procedural and substantive grounds. The petition cited lack of clarity and consistency in the application of sanctions and argued that the individuals sanctioned could not be held accountable for the non-implementation of the Conakry Agreement.

6. On 28 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 2404 (2018), by which it extended the mandate of UNIOGBIS for another year, from 1 March 2018 to 28 February 2019. In the resolution, the Council's identified three priorities for UNIOGBIS support, namely, the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement, the electoral process to ensure legislative elections in 2018, and the review of the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau. In an important departure from previous resolutions, the Council dropped all rule-of-law and security institutions tasks from the mandate of UNIOGBIS. The Council acknowledged the ECOWAS Authority's directive to the President of the ECOWAS Commission to implement sanctions against any person or organization impeding the process to end the crisis in Guinea-Bissau and noted the Authority's strong appeal to the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the European Union and the United Nations to support ECOWAS in the effective implementation of the sanctions.

7. On 4 March, members of the Movement of Conscientious and Non-Conformist Citizens (Movimento dos Cidadãos Conscientes e Inconformados) held a peaceful march towards the ECOWAS mission in Bissau, calling for the full application of sanctions against individuals obstructing the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The organizers handed a petition to the ECOWAS representative requesting that President Vaz be added to the sanctions list.

8. During the reporting period, the organization of legislative and presidential elections became the most challenging and pressing task for the Government. On 26 February, the acting president of the National Electoral Commission, José Pedro Sambú, advised President Vaz that it would not be technically feasible to hold elections in May, at the end of the four-year legislative term, as required by the Constitution. On 27 February, Mr. Sambú announced a revised timeline for the legislative elections, postponing the polls until 18 November. According to the National Electoral Commission, the new date was more realistic in view of the technical hurdles to be overcome and the short lead time available to complete a voter registration update.

9. Under the Constitution and the national electoral law, the President is required to set the date of presidential and legislative elections by decree, following

consultations with the Government, political parties and the National Electoral Commission. To that end, on 28 February and 1 March, President Vaz met with representatives of 40 of the country's registered political parties to agree on a possible date. In the meetings, the leaders of the two largest parties, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde — PAIGC) and the Party of Social Renewal (Partido da Renovação Social — PRS), demanded that elections be held in 2018 in accordance with the relevant constitutional provisions and electoral laws. There was widespread speculation that the ulterior motive of President Vaz was to hold legislative and presidential elections simultaneously in 2019, as he had announced to his peers at the ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority on 16 December 2017. In that context, the leader of the United People's Assembly — Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau (Assembleia do Povo Unido — Partido Democrático da Guiné-Bissau), Nuno Nabiam, denounced the lengthy consultative process as a deliberate manoeuvre by the President to delay the electoral process.

10. On 9 March, the Government and the United Nations signed onto a joint project, to be managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through a basket fund established for donor contributions, to support the national authorities in organizing the legislative elections. Developed by UNDP over six months in close consultation with the Government and the European Union, the budget of the project is $7.7 million. At the signing ceremony, the Government confirmed its contribution of $1 million, an unprecedented investment of State funds in elections. The Government later announced a further $800,000 to supplement its initial contribution.

11. As the then Prime Minister Artur Da Silva struggled to form an inclusive Government, President Vaz convened a meeting on 14 March to hold consultations with key political actors, civil society organizations and the group of five international partners represented in Guinea-Bissau — the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, ECOWAS, the European Union and the United Nations. The President reiterated his commitment to and support for legislative elections in 2018 and regretted the lack of progress in finding a solution to the political and institutional stalemate. Absent from the session were PAIGC and its ally, the Collective of Democratic Political Parties United against the Dictatorship (Coletivo de Partidos Políticos Democráticos Unidos Contra a Ditadura), which held a joint press conference on the same day denouncing any attempt by President Vaz to work outside the framework of the Conakry Agreement to overcome the impasse. The President of the National Assembly also declined to participate in the meeting.

12. On 29 March, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union issued a communiqué emphasizing that the Conakry Agreement remained the primary framework for the resolution of the political impasse in Guinea-Bissau and calling upon national actors to abide by their commitments and to ensure the full implementation of the ECOWAS road map and the Conakry Agreement. The Council stressed that the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS should remain in force until the full implementation of the Agreement, and requested ECOWAS to develop a mechanism to ensure that the sanctions worked effectively. The Council also called upon the Bissau-Guinean authorities to respect the Constitution with regard to the legislative and presidential elections scheduled for 2018 and 2019. Finally, the Council appealed to international partners to provide the financial support necessary to enable the extension of the mandate of the ECOWAS mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB).

13. Meanwhile, in Bissau, intense consultations facilitated by traditional and religious leaders in March and April, under the aegis of the Catholic bishop of Bissau, resulted in a rapprochement between PAIGC and PRS. On the basis of an agreement on principles, the two parties agreed on the naming of a Prime Minister of consensus and pledged to participate in an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to

elect the new members of the National Electoral Commission and to extend the current legislature until the November elections. On 9 April, in a meeting with the group of five international partners in Bissau, the President of the National Assembly indicated that he could only consider a request for the body to reconvene if the terms of the Conakry Agreement were fulfilled, starting with the appointment of a Prime Minister of consensus.

14. An ECOWAS ministerial delegation dispatched to Bissau on 11 April, led by the President of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo, Robert Dussey, noted the rapprochement between PAIGC and PRS. In a communiqué issued at the end of the visit, the delegation welcomed the willingness of the two main political parties to work together to find a solution to the political impasse.

15. On 14 April, at its summit in Lomé, the ECOWAS Authority took positive note of the decisions by President Vaz to appoint a Prime Minister of consensus and to announce a date for legislative elections. The Authority also noted the decision by the Bissau-Guinean political actors to hold an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to elect the members of the National Electoral Commission and to extend the current legislature. The Authority further authorized the extension of the ECOMIB presence until 30 June.

16. On 16 April, upon his return to Bissau from an extraordinary summit of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, President Vaz issued decrees to dismiss Prime Minister Da Silva and appoint Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister of consensus, and to set 18 November 2018 as the date for legislative elections. Prime Minister Gomes was sworn in on the same day. In reaction to those developments, a group of 15 parliamentarians that had been expelled from PAIGC called for the lifting of the ECOWAS sanctions.

17. On 19 April, the National Assembly met in a plenary session for the first time since December 2015. José Pedro Sambú, who had been serving as acting president of the National Electoral Commission, was elected to the post with 93 votes in favour, 1 abstention and 8 absentees. The National Assembly also adopted a bill to amend the Constitution, exceptionally extending the legislature beyond its four-year mandate, until November 2018. The following day, the Bissau-Guinean League of Human Rights (Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos) denounced the extension of the current legislature as unconstitutional.

18. An ECOWAS ministerial-level delegation, comprising the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo and the Minister of State and Secretary-General of the Presidency of Guinea, visited Bissau on 24 April to follow up on the formation of an inclusive Government. The delegation met with President Vaz, Prime Minister Gomes, the leaders of PAIGC and PRS, the Catholic bishop of Bissau and representatives of the group of five international partners in Bissau.

19. On 25 April, President Vaz issued a decree appointing the 26 members of the new Government, which comprised representatives of the political parties with seats in the National Assembly, the group of 15 parliamentarians that had been expelled from PAIGC and members of the Office of the President. In his statement at the swearing-in ceremony the next day, the President emphasized that the Prime Minister's main responsibility was to prepare for the holding of legislative elections on 18 November. Prime Minister Gomes remarked that his Government would strive to fully implement the Conakry Agreement and ensure that legislative elections were held on time. On 30 April, President Vaz appointed the former Minister of Interior, Botche Candé, who is featured on the list of individuals sanctioned by ECOWAS, as Minister of State and Adviser to the President on Defence, Internal and External Security Affairs.

20. On 6 June, Prime Minister Gomes presented a draft stability pact to the representatives of the group of five international partners in Bissau. He announced that the draft would be circulated to political parties for consultation. According to the Prime Minister, the stability pact would serve as the basis for the work of the inclusive Government in the period leading to the elections. To date, political parties have not officially reacted to the draft stability pact, which has yet to be submitted to a national round-table dialogue, as prescribed in the Conakry Agreement. Youth groups and the Council of Women have expressed concern over the lack of broader consultations.

21. The National Assembly adopted a new government programme and a State budget on 19 and 21 June, respectively. The budget was the first to be adopted since the dismissal of Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira in August 2015. It was set at $381 million, with a projected deficit of $78 million. The government programme focuses on electoral preparations.

22. Despite those positive developments, political rivalries between PAIGC and PRS re-surfaced. On 2 May, the Minister of Territorial Administration, Ester Fernandes, announced the suspension of eight regional governors, all of whom were perceived as being aligned with PRS. The PRS parliamentary leader denounced the measure as a violation of the agreement on principles reached between the two parties in March and April under the aegis of the Catholic bishop of Bissau. After weeks of consultations facilitated by ECOWAS, PRS recognized the prerogative of the PAIGC Minister to nominate regional governors. On 5 June, eight new regional governors and the mayor of Bissau, all close to PAIGC, were appointed.

23. Since June, the Government of Prime Minister Gomes has struggled to reach consensus on the modalities for the holding of elections. One particular stumbling block has been the procedure for the voter registration update, a prerequisite that should have begun in July, or 90 days before the November elections. The Prime Minister repeatedly invited political parties represented in the National Assembly to technical-level meetings to deliberate on options for the printing of voter registration cards, which resulted in politicized discussions on whether cards were to be printed at the site of registration, at a central printing location in Bissau, or abroad. UNDP electoral experts advised the Government against on-site printing owing to anticipated logistical hurdles associated with the transport of printing equipment across the country during the rainy season. Nevertheless, PRS continued to insist on the on-site printing option, while other parties showed flexibility towards the option of printing cards in Bissau and in the regional offices of the National Electoral Commission.

24. On 4 July, Braima Camará, the coordinator of the group of 15 parliamentarians that had been expelled from PAIGC, resigned from Parliament and broke away from PAIGC in anticipation of the formal establishment of his Movement for Democratic Alternation (Movimento de Alternância Democrática) as a new political party.

25. On 18 July, in the final declaration at their conference held at Santa Maria, Cabo Verde, the Heads of State and Government of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries affirmed their readiness to provide electoral assistance and called upon international partners to materialize the financial pledges already made.

26. On 20 July, the Government issued a press release setting 23 August to 23 September as the period for voter registration and indicating that voter registration cards would be printed by the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process in Bissau and the regional offices of the National Electoral Commission. The Government also reaffirmed its determination to hold legislative elections on 18 November.

27. On 31 July, in the final communiqué of its summit held in Lomé, the ECOWAS Authority urged Bissau-Guinean political stakeholders and civil society to continue to demonstrate their commitment to adhering to the date of 18 November 2018 for the holding of legislative elections; expressed its concern over the slow pace of implementation of the timetable for legislative elections; and appealed to the international community to support Guinea-Bissau. It noted a financial contribution of $1 million by the West African Economic and Monetary Union for the electoral preparations and decided to contribute $2 million. The Authority welcomed the progress made since the ECOWAS summit of 14 April and also decided to lift the targeted sanctions imposed on 4 February against 19 stakeholders.

B. Security situation

28. Overall, the security situation in Guinea-Bissau has remained calm. Street protests have decreased since the appointment of the new Government. However, common crime, notably robberies and theft, reportedly increased. Reports also indicate an increase in illicit cross-border activities, especially along the northern frontier with Senegal.

29. During the reporting period, the armed forces remained neutral, under strong leadership, and continued to refrain from interfering in political affairs.

C. Human rights situation

30. The human rights situation remained largely unchanged. The respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights have been hampered by weak State institutions and continued political instability. The country has yet to take additional steps to establish an independent national human rights commission, in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles), and the current national human rights mechanism continues to work under State supervision and guidance.

31. No significant progress was made to investigate human rights violations, especially those associated with past military coups and associated violence. On 20 March, a group of barristers denounced cases of arbitrary detention and corruption, allegedly perpetrated by prosecutors, and announced the creation of an association to fight corruption and human rights violations in the justice system. On 23 April, the ECOWAS Court of Justice held a hearing in Bamako in relation to allegations, lodged on 5 December 2016, of excessive use of force and suppression of the right to peaceful demonstration in Guinea-Bissau; the final decision is due on 16 October 2018.

32. A reversal of the previously reported tendency to restrict political participation and the right of peaceful assembly was registered during the reporting period. Civil society organizations held a series of peaceful marches and vigils in Bissau without reported incidents. Strikes also occurred without significant disturbances. Workers assigned to the Judiciary Police went on strike in February, and the National Union of Workers of Guinea-Bissau (União Nacional dos Trabalhadores da Guiné-Bissau) declared general strikes by public workers from 7 to 9 May, 12 to 14 June and 26 to 28 June, claiming salary arrears and readjustments, along with pensions for public servants.

D. Social, economic and humanitarian situation

33. The economic growth rate for Guinea-Bissau in 2018 is expected to reach 5.3 per cent, representing a generally positive outlook, albeit with lower growth than in 2016 or 2017. On 1 June, the International Monetary Fund approved a one-year extension of its extended credit facility to sustain macroeconomic stability during the upcoming election period and to support reforms focused on mobilizing revenue and addressing gaps in essential infrastructure. The extension released an additional $4.3 million, bringing the total amount disbursed under the extended credit facility to $24.2 million. Various international financial institutions and development banks, including the World Bank, have indicated that they are considering re-initiating budget support should the holding of legislative elections be successful and should a new Government be appointed.

34. There is growing concern that the 2018 cashew harvest, the country's single most important revenue earner, may decrease by up to 20 per cent compared to 2017, which recorded a harvest of approximately 200,000 metric tons. The anticipated poorer harvest is being attributed to adverse weather conditions and to fungal blight in some areas. In March, President Vaz set an inordinately high reference price for cashews, at 1,000 CFA francs (approximately $1.75) per kilogram, almost double the market price in the region. Farmers have since been reluctant to sell their product below the reference price and have been inclined to withhold it. While it is too early to predict the total volume of cashew exports for the year, there is concern that small-scale producers may face challenging economic times ahead.

35. A poorer cashew harvest and a lower volume of exports may also worsen the level of food insecurity in the next few months. Between February and May, approximately 210,000 people were forecast to become food insecure, including more than 25,000 who would require immediate food assistance. The country is likely to remain vulnerable to food insecurity, in particular in rural areas, if it remains exposed to political instability, the absence of effective food security policies, and a lack of diversification of subsistence and income-generating agriculture.

36. The provision of basic public services deteriorated in the reporting period, with national energy production capacity reduced by one third owing to the lack of sound management of the public utility company and financial difficulties on the part of the national treasury. The population of Bissau faced longer periods of electricity and water shortages. Energy supplies outside Bissau are among the lowest in West Africa, reaching only 4 per cent of rural towns. In addition, strike actions related to the inability of the Government to fulfil promises to meet demands for an increase in public sector wages have seriously affected the provision of schooling and medical services nationwide.

III. Status of implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

A. Implementation of the Conakry Agreement, the ECOWAS road map, political dialogue and a national reconciliation process, and the strengthening of democratic governance, including through urgent reforms

37. In response to a significantly-revised mandate, UNIOGBIS prioritized engagement with national stakeholders to foster solutions to implement the Conakry

Agreement. My Special Representative maintained frequent contact with the President, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Supreme Court and the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces. He also liaised with leaders of political parties and civil society representatives, including women and youth groups.

38. My Special Representative continued to coordinate the group of five international partners in Bissau to help to address the political stalemate. In the month preceding the extraordinary summit of the ECOWAS Authority on 14 April, the group held consultations with key political actors, including the President on 16 March and the President of the National Assembly on 9 April, to stress that the Conakry Agreement remained the primary framework for resolving the political stalemate.

39. UNIOGBIS reinforced its cooperation with ECOWAS in support of the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, including by providing technical assistance in preparation for the extraordinary summit of 14 April. To ensure a coordinated approach, my Special Representative maintained regular contact with the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President Gnassingbé of Togo, and the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, President Alpha Condé of Guinea.

40. To garner international support for the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, my Special Representative held bilateral consultations in Brussels, Lisbon and Paris from 26 February to 2 March, engaged with the International Organization of la Francophonie during an official visit to Bissau on 21 May, and participated in a summit of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries held in Santa Maria, Cabo Verde, on 17 and 18 July.

41. UNIOGBIS also provided strategic and technical advice and support, as well as financial assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund, to the organizing commission of a national conference towards the consolidation of peace and development in Guinea-Bissau. In May, the commission held a series of meetings with key national stakeholders, including President Vaz and the President of the National Assembly, to formally present its report, entitled "In the Name of Peace" (Em Nome da Paz). The report presents the main findings and recommendations from nationwide consultations with more than 3,000 persons between 2009 and 2017 on the causes of conflict and instability in Guinea-Bissau. The presentations made to authorities at the meetings helped to reignite interest in the work of the commission and focused attention on the need for national reconciliation.

B. Timely conduct of legislative elections in 2018

42. My Special Representative, in close coordination with international partners, prioritized his good offices engagement with national actors with a view to making progress in preparing for the holding of legislative elections on 18 November. He consulted regularly with the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, leaders of political parties and the president of the National Electoral Commission on the status of preparations for elections and associated challenges, including voter registration.

43. Meanwhile, UNIOGBIS and UNDP, in coordination with international partners, also emphasized the provision of support to the Government in making technical preparations and mobilizing resources for the elections. The electoral support project developed by UNDP and the European Union is strengthening the capacity of the National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process (in the Ministry of Territorial Administration) to update the voter registry, carry out a civic education campaign for voters and complete the remaining technical requirements for the opening of the polls. UNIOGBIS and the National Electoral

Commission have co-chaired regular meetings to brief the Government, political parties and international partners on the status of electoral preparations, including related resource requirements.

44. On 28 February, UNDP and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process delivered a training session in Bissau on voter registration to 267 people, including 40 women, who work for the voter registration regional commissions. The training strengthened the capacity of participants in the use of data collection techniques and tools and enhanced their understanding of the legal framework for nationwide voter registration.

45. In May, UNDP, with support from the European Union, assisted the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process in defining the voter registration methodology and designing technical specifications for the voter registration equipment. UNDP is finalizing the procurement of voter registration equipment to support national authorities in preparing for the elections.

46. From 18 to 29 June, and from 9 to 28 July, UNIOGBIS facilitated the delivery of courses on electoral security and the prevention of violence, in Bissau, with support from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre and sponsorship by Germany. A total of 95 members of Bissau-Guinean public security, law enforcement and defence institutions, including 17 women, participated in the training, which focused on early-warning mechanisms and nationwide joint command arrangements.

C. Review of the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau

47. Despite the formation of an inclusive Government and the resumption of the full functioning of the National Assembly, national stakeholders have displayed reluctance to take action on critical reform issues, including the review of the Constitution, before the holding of legislative elections.

48. In April, UNIOGBIS resumed engagement with the National Assembly's ad hoc commission on constitutional reform and is currently developing a plan to support the commission in implementing priority actions required for expediting the review of the Constitution. UNIOGBIS is also providing technical and financial support, with resources from the Peacebuilding Fund, to enhance the capacity of civil society organizations to contribute to consultations on the draft proposal for the revised Constitution to be prepared by the ad hoc commission.

D. Strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing the capacity of State organs

49. Between 9 May and 21 June, UNIOGBIS delivered five seminars on military leadership to more than 200 officers in the armed forces, 10 members of the National Defence Institute and 40 officers in the National Guard, including 20 women, to enhance their performance in command positions and raise awareness of the importance of respect by the military for constitutional prerogatives and the rule of law. On 1 June, UNIOGBIS replicated the seminars in a training session sponsored by the General Staff of the Armed Forces for 48 officers who expected to assume positions as political advisers to senior military commanders.

50. In support of a joint programme on police, justice and corrections under the United Nations global focal point arrangement, UNIOGBIS continued to co-locate personnel in justice and security institutions to enhance efficiency in the implementation of national strategies on public security, law enforcement and

judiciary and penitentiary management. Under a related access to justice project, UNDP handed over a new court house to authorities in Mansoa, in the Oio region.

E. Promotion and protection of human rights

51. UNIOGBIS continued to assist national authorities in the promotion and protection of human rights, by providing strategic advice, technical and financial support and by undertaking advocacy, capacity-building, awareness-raising and training activities. Assistance included the provision of technical advice to the Secretariat of State for Planning and Regional Integration in the mainstreaming of human rights into the ongoing alignment and integration of the country's strategic and operational plan, "Terra Ranka", with global development frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

52. UNIOGBIS continued to assist the National Network of Human Rights Defenders by providing training in monitoring and protecting human rights, in particular during the electoral process. On 20 and 21 April, UNIOGBIS supported a retreat for Network members that focused on the establishment of early-warning and protection mechanisms. Improved capacity in those areas will enhance engagement between the Network and international human rights mechanisms, including the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council and others.

53. On 7 April, UNIOGBIS contributed to a training session organized by the Bissau-Guinean League of Human Rights on freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration. Thirty law enforcement officials, including 5 women, from the Rapid Intervention Police, the Public Order Police and the National Guard participated in the training. From 27 April to 1 May, UNIOGBIS organized a five-day human rights campaign involving hundreds of young people from Bissau and the Biombo, Cacheu and Gabu regions in the context of a citizenship-building initiative.

54. Since April, UNIOGBIS has been raising awareness among electoral stakeholders, including the staff of the regional offices of National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process, representatives of civil society organizations, local and religious leaders, persons with disabilities, media practitioners and technicians on their roles and responsibilities with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights in the electoral processes. Multi-stakeholder workshops on human rights in electoral processes were jointly organized by UNIOGBIS, UNDP, the National Electoral Commission and the Technical Support Office for the Electoral Process for a total of 245 participants, including 85 women, from Bissau and the Bolama, Cacheu, Oio and Quinara regions.

55. Assessments in Bafatá from 17 to 19 April, in Gabu from 23 to 26 April, and in Quinara from 8 to 10 May, showed that extreme poverty, unequal access to education, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination affecting women and girls, as well as harmful traditional practices, including early and forced marriage, all limited the rights of women and youth to participate in economic life, which had a detrimental impact on their enjoyment of the right to participate in the public and political spheres.

56. On 5 July, UNIOGBIS initiated a series of briefings on human rights-related issues in the area of transitional justice and reconciliation with members of the organizing commission for the national conference towards the consolidation of peace and development in Guinea-Bissau. The briefings aimed to strengthen the capacity of members to understand the human rights implications of the various proposals for national reconciliation outlined by the organizing commission in its 2017 report.

F. Combating drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

57. Since my previous report, there have been modest signs of progress towards a national commitment to countering drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. On 4 April, a joint airport interdiction task force became operational at Bissau's international airport, in the framework of the Airport Communication Project of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization. The Government assigned 15 officers from the Judicial Police, Customs, the National Guard, the Public Order Police and the National Central Bureau at INTERPOL to this nationally owned interservice structure. During UNODC-led on-the-job mentoring in profiling and targeting techniques, task force members arrested seven drug couriers and seized 6.9 kilograms of cocaine along the São Paulo-Lisbon-Bissau air route, which demonstrated the continued use of Guinea-Bissau as a transit country for cocaine trafficking from South America.

58. As part of the joint programme on police, justice and corrections, UNIOGBIS and UNODC provided training to the Judicial Police, the Public Order Police, the National Guard, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Transnational Crime Unit and the joint airport interdiction task force, contributing to an increase in the number of meetings among those entities, improved planning of joint operations and increased sharing of timely information.

59. During the reporting period and pursuant to Security Council resolution 2404 (2018), UNODC increased its activities in Guinea-Bissau and, along with UNIOGBIS, supported the Government in expanding its capacity to operate in the regions through the establishment of Judicial Police outposts in Catió, in the Tombali region, and in the Bubaque islands, in the Bijagós archipelago of the Bolama region. The archipelago, with its 88 islands, exposes the country to criminal activities owing to the difficulties of controlling its vast territorial waters. In April, UNODC launched a new project in Guinea-Bissau aimed at enhancing national capacities and fostering stronger regional cooperation to detect and investigate cross-border organized crime in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. In May, UNODC and France also conducted a joint assessment of how to enhance maritime security and the rule of law through a sustainable development perspective. In May, UNODC deployed to Bissau a senior law enforcement expert on trafficking in persons.

60. UNIOGBIS and UNODC also supported the reactivation of the Transnational Crime Unit, which had not been operational since February 2017. The Unit recommenced operations after the appointment, on 14 May, of a new director of the Judiciary Police, who prioritized the reassignment of Judiciary Police members to the Unit, who now constitute half the Unit's capacity. UNIOGBIS co-located police advisers to mentor their counterparts in the Transnational Crime Unit.

61. UNIOGBIS provided technical and financial support for the organizing of the second General Congress of Public Prosecutors, held on 23 and 24 May in Bissau. Discussions and recommendations focused on the role of magistrates and public prosecutors in the fight against corruption and impunity, notably with respect to drug trafficking and organized crime, and strategies to resist undue political and military influence. UNODC is also leading the finalization of an inter-agency strategy to take a cross-pillar approach to address the drug problem. That will encourage joint programming between entities to support national and regional authorities in the implementation of more balanced and people-centred policies that promote human rights, health and social rehabilitation alongside law enforcement efforts.

62. In a meeting with my Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez Perez, held in Bissau on 25 May, President Vaz requested increased support from the

international community to combat transnational organized crime, including drug and human trafficking. The President noted that illicit activities, including the involvement of elements of the armed forces, were affecting stability and democratic governance. In a meeting with UNODC and UNIOGBIS, on 4 June, the President reiterated those concerns and called upon UNODC to support the design and implementation of a national plan to tackle serious transnational organized crime, in cooperation with UNIOGBIS. The President indicated that he would quickly formalize his request for assistance in a letter to be sent to the Executive Director of UNODC. To date, UNODC has not yet received that letter.

63. On 9 July, UNIOGBIS launched a pilot community protection programme in Buba in Quinara region to improve prevention and to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime by fostering partnerships between State institutions and the population.

64. During the reporting period, UNIOGBIS and UNODC also provided training to 23 law enforcement officers on border control and mentored law enforcement counterparts in conducting human trafficking investigations. UNIOGBIS and the African Union provided technical support and mentoring in the installation and use of the Mobile INTERPOL Network Database at the border posts of Djegue (North), Pirada (Northeast) and Cuntabane (South), which resulted in enhanced border control.

G. Incorporating a gender perspective into peacebuilding

65. During the reporting period, UNIOGBIS provided strategic and technical advice and support in the process leading to the creation, on 5 April, of the Bissau-Guinean Women's Council, an inclusive group of women aiming to promote women's participation in national peacebuilding, reconciliation and political processes. Composed of 25 women representing civil society, political parties and the private sector from Bissau and the regions, the Council emanated from the former Women's Facilitation Group, which had succeeded in facilitating direct dialogue between protagonists to the political impasse in July 2017.

66. On 25 May, the Women's Council, with technical and financial support from UNIOGBIS through the Peacebuilding Fund, organized the first National Forum of Women and Girls for Peace in Bissau. The event brought together approximately 800 women to make concrete recommendations to political stakeholders on issues affecting efforts to sustain peace in Guinea-Bissau. In preparation for the National Forum, the Women's Council held a series of smaller conferences in all regions, which served to disseminate messages about the need for social cohesion and to gather the views of women and youth on the impact of the political impasse on their lives.

67. The views were presented at the National Forum to representatives of the Government, international partners and the United Nations, including my Senior Adviser on Policy. The process of consultations and preparations for the event helped to legitimize the Women's Council as a nationally grown peacebuilding network and to bring the voices of women and youth from across the country to decision-makers in the capital.

68. On 7 June, with continued support from UNIOGBIS, the Women's Council adopted the outcome document of the regional conferences and the National Forum. The document captures the Women's Council's agreed modalities of engagement in both a national round table, to be organized by the Government to produce an inclusive stability pact, and in the promotion of women's participation in the upcoming legislative elections.

69. From May to July, UNIOGBIS, in collaboration with the United Nations country team and its gender theme group led by UN-Women, provided support to a women's political platform to revive efforts to adopt a law on gender parity quotas for legislative and administrative elections. In that regard, UNIOGBIS provided technical advice in the creation of an advocacy committee consisting of representatives of women's groups that is reviewing an existing draft proposal for submission to the National Assembly before the next legislative elections.

H. Mobilization, harmonization and coordination of international assistance

70. On 19 and 20 March, and on 9 and 10 July, UNIOGBIS, UNDP and the European Union undertook joint missions to Dakar to mobilize resources for the legislative elections. In separate consultations with non-resident embassies accredited to Guinea-Bissau and at round-table consultations with bilateral partners, UNIOGBIS and the European Union underscored the urgency of securing resources to enable the electoral cartography and voter registration updates.

71. While the Government and UNDP have provided an initial contribution of $1.8 million and $200,000, respectively, towards the $7.7 million needed for the elections support project agreed between the previous Government and the United Nations, a funding gap of $5.7 million remains. Even taking into account the additional commitments made by the European Union (€2.5 million), Japan ($1 million), Italy (€100,000) and the Government ($500,000), there would still be an outstanding gap of $1.2 million. Moreover, the amounts committed may not be available before September, and the currently available funds are sufficient only to purchase voter registration equipment and software, but not to fund the entire operation. The Government has requested UNDP to proceed with the procurement of voter registration equipment, and has made parallel equipment loan requests to Angola, Nigeria, Portugal and Timor-Leste to enable the immediate start of voter registration. Those demarches have so far not been successful.

IV. Cross-cutting issues

A. Integration of the United Nations system

72. The Mission and the United Nations country team worked with Government counterparts to complete and endorse the 2016 and 2017 progress reports with respect to the United Nations Peacebuilding Assistance Framework (2016–2020) and to prepare joint workplans for 2018. UNIOGBIS and the United Nations country team produced a partnership and resource mobilization strategy, with a view to engaging in strategic and coherent fundraising to cover the remaining 65 per cent funding gap in the Framework's budget.

73. The human rights working group established under the United Nations Peacebuilding Assistance Framework was reactivated during the reporting period. The group serves as a platform for sharing information on key human rights policies with the United Nations country team and national partners.

74. UNIOGBIS and the United Nations country team continued to implement six projects funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, to advance efforts to promote political dialogue and national reconciliation, to strengthen the media and the justice sectors, to enhance the participation of women and youth in the political life of the country and to strengthen the leadership skills of rural youth groups to act as peacebuilders.

B. Strategic communication and public information

75. UNIOGBIS continued to raise awareness on aspects of the work and mandate of the United Nations in Guinea-Bissau, including the good offices of my Special Representative and the activities of the United Nations country team, through a variety of media, including press releases, articles, social media posts, radio programmes and an external newsletter.

76. From 15 April to 22 June, UNIOGBIS held the third edition of its community outreach programme on citizenship. The programme, which consisted of community discussions and film screenings, raised awareness among more than 6,000 persons, including 2,000 women, in 40 locations across the country on issues relating to the implementation of the UNIOGBIS mandate. The events also served as an opportunity to distribute more than 4,000 copies of an illustrated handbook on citizens' constitutional rights.

77. UNIOGBIS, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, intensified efforts to promote the independence of the media by strengthening the capacity of journalists and media professionals and associations with a view to the upcoming elections. In that regard, UNIOGBIS provided training on the ethical coverage of elections to a total of 100 journalists, including 10 women, on 19 and 20 March and from 10 to 12 May. The Mission also provided technical support towards strengthening the governance organs of media associations, including in the revision of relevant statutes, and is contributing to a revision of the legal framework for the media sector.

C. Staff safety and security

78. The overall security situation for United Nations personnel in Guinea-Bissau remained stable. Despite a reported increase in common crime, security and criminal incidents rarely affected United Nations personnel.

V. Temporary internal recalibration of the Mission

79. UNIOGBIS is in the process of realigning its work in accordance with its revised mandate under Security Council resolution 2404 (2018). The Mission's temporary recalibration conforms to the recommendations of a technical assessment mission led by the Department of Political Affairs in late March for that purpose, and also reflects the recommendations of the strategic review mission of December 2016. Following the abrogation by the Security Council of the core tasks of UNIOGBIS in the field of rule of law and security institutions, the Mission temporarily reconfigured staffing arrangements to focus on delivery under its three mandated priorities. Staff from the former rule of law and security institutions section are working in three clusters for the remainder of 2018: (a) political affairs and good offices; (b) human rights and gender; and (c) combating drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. Their temporary reassignment was warranted by the increased responsibilities of the political affairs component of the Mission engendered by the electoral process, and the need to strengthen the Mission's regional offices in that regard and to handle related demands.

80. Pursuant to resolution 2404 (2018), the Mission retained the mandated task of providing strategic and technical advice and support to the Government of Guinea-Bissau to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in close cooperation with UNODC. UNIOGBIS temporarily formed a dedicated unit for combatting drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, drawing from existing resources in its current budget. The unit has continued existing Mission activities to

provide strategic and technical support to State institutions in combating drug trafficking and transnational organized crime.

81. The Secretariat will be proposing a revised budget for UNIOGBIS for 2019, to be considered by the General Assembly during its seventy-third session, that closely reflects the revised mandate under resolution 2404 (2018). The temporary recalibration of the Mission and its budget proposal for 2019 were undertaken without prejudice to recommendations arising from the planned strategic assessment of the Mission. The latter will include options for a possible reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the country and the reprioritization of tasks, which I will submit to the Security Council in November, and on which the Council is expected to pronounce itself in February 2019, when the renewal of the mandate of UNIOGBIS will be under consideration.

VI. Observations

82. I remain concerned about the situation in Guinea-Bissau, despite the encouraging progress achieved earlier in 2018 towards a solution to the country's longstanding political and institutional stalemate. The appointment of a Prime Minister of consensus, the formation of an inclusive Government and the resumption of the full functioning of the National Assembly have provided reason for new resolve after three years of gridlock. Those developments also represent the fulfilment of three key steps towards the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement. I laud in particular the efforts undertaken by religious leaders and civil society organizations to facilitate a rapprochement between the national political actors. All national stakeholders, including political parties, the President, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly and the leaders of PAIGC and PRS, need to continue constructive dialogue to resolve their differences and move forward with the full implementation of the ECOWAS road map and the Conakry Agreement. I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to support their efforts in that regard.

83. The sustained efforts by ECOWAS to mediate a solution to the political stalemate and to support national actors in fully implementing the Conakry Agreement have remained indispensable. I encourage the monitoring committee comprising the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, President Condé of Guinea, the new Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, to continue to support Bissau-Guineans in fully implementing the Agreement and the ECOWAS road map. The United Nations supports the efforts of ECOWAS, in close cooperation with the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and European Union partners.

84. Most concerning are the increasing delays and the persistent lack of clarity and accountability in the preparations for the holding of legislative elections in 2018. As the focus of national politics is now on the legislative and presidential elections, their timely and credible conduct in 2018 and 2019, respectively, is the crucial next step towards a resumption of sustainable peacebuilding. The elections must be held in accordance with the Constitution and national laws and commitments. I call upon the Prime Minister and national authorities to provide firm political direction for the electoral process, to expedite the required technical preparations and to empower the electoral management bodies to implement the soundest solutions for the holding of timely and credible elections. The United Nations will continue to assist wherever possible to support the resolve of national partners, including with respect to technical preparations and the mobilization of the required resources.

85. With respect to the mobilization of the resources required for the timely holding of legislative elections, I strongly encourage donors to help to fill the financial gap in the electoral assistance project. The national stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau have already disbursed an unprecedented $1.8 million towards the elections, and have pledged an additional $500,000.

86. Constitutional review remains an important avenue to preventing a recurrence of political and institutional stalemate after the elections. The electoral challenges are indeed testimony to the limited sustainability of the current inclusive Government and its institutional framework. The holding of legislative elections must therefore have the highest priority, as little progress on the peacebuilding priorities of Guinea-Bissau can be expected prior to a new political dispensation being put into place. Nevertheless, I call upon all national stakeholders to simultaneously gauge their availability to expedite and complete the review of the country's Constitution at the earliest convenience, in respect for full national ownership. The time between legislative elections in 2018 and presidential polls in 2019 could offer an opportunity to expedite the review of the Constitution, provided that legislative elections are held in a timely manner and a sense of urgency for constitutional reform can be instilled among the political actors in Guinea-Bissau.

87. Against that backdrop, UNIOGBIS has swiftly moved to focus its activities on its revised mandate, in particular with respect to supporting the electoral process to ensure the holding of legislative elections in 2018. I commend the Mission's efforts to temporarily realign its staff and to make effective and efficient use of its existing resources to ensure mandate delivery in this key moment for the political process in the country. I count on the support of Security Council members and other international partners as I prepare my upcoming strategic assessment, which will inform the options I provide to the Security Council in November with respect to a possible reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in Guinea-Bissau and a reprioritization of tasks.

88. National authorities have taken some steps towards ensuring greater respect for the right of freedom of assembly. However, many obstacles remain to ensuring that all members of society, especially women and youth, can fully exercise their right to political participation. I call upon the State to take immediate measures to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in the country. With specific regard to the upcoming legislative and presidential elections, the authorities should make it a priority to take any measures that promote the active participation of women as voters and candidates in both polls.

89. Respect for human rights is an essential prerequisite for stability, peace and sustainable development in Guinea-Bissau. The formalization of the National Network of Human Rights Defenders is a positive step, and I invite the international community to support the Network. The establishment of an independent national human rights institution, in compliance with the Paris Principles, and an effective interministerial commission on human rights to follow up on and implement recommendations from regional and international human rights mechanisms, should remain a central goal for Guinea-Bissau.

90. I take note of the professionalism displayed by the armed forces through their continued non-interference in national politics and judicial affairs, and their discharge of duties in accordance with their constitutionally mandated role. In the electoral context, the extension of ECOMIB remains an important factor in ensuring stability, and Member States should be encouraged to provide the financial and military support required for its continued operation.

91. Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime are threats to peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau, the subregion and beyond. Addressing those challenges

requires multifaceted and cross-sectoral approaches at the national and regional levels. I call upon Member States to provide the resources necessary to enable UNODC to enhance its presence in the country and support the authorities in implementing comprehensive and people-centred responses to drug and human trafficking and transnational organized crime.

92. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, José Viegas Filho, the Mission staff and the United Nations country team for their dedication. I am also grateful to my former Special Representative, Modibo Touré, for his able and dedicated leadership, and for the accomplishments of the Mission during his tenure at UNIOGBIS.

United Nations S/2018/772

Security Council

Distr.: General
22 August 2018
English
Original: Russian

Letter dated 17 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for 16 and 17 August 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Safronkov**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

18-13802 (E) 240818 240818

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Annex to the letter dated 17 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (16 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 26 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 18 in Ladhiqiyah, 7 in Aleppo and 1 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported seven incidents of gunfire: five in Idlib Governorate and two in Hama Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out one humanitarian operation.

In Rastan, Homs Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed.

In total, 1,896 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,908.66 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 226 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 88,152 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (17 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 25 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 12 in Ladhiqiyah, 11 in Aleppo and 2 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported three incidents of gunfire: two in Idlib Governorate and one in Hama Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out two humanitarian operations.

- In Hatla, Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed.
- In Jasim, Dar'a Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed.

In total, 1,898 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,914.26 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 14 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 88,166 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/773

Security Council

Distr.: General
17 August 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 15 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), in which the Council requested me to establish an investigative team, headed by a special adviser, to support domestic efforts to hold Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) accountable by collecting, preserving and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide committed by the terrorist group ISIL in Iraq.

The Security Council also requested that, following the approval by the Council of the terms of reference of the Investigative Team, I undertake without delay the steps, measures and arrangements necessary for the speedy establishment and full functioning of the Team, and notify the Council when the Team begins its work.

Following the approval by the Security Council of the terms of reference of the Investigative Team on 14 February 2018, I appointed Karim Asad Ahmad Khan (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team on 13 July 2018. The Special Adviser has been working, in close coordination with the Secretariat, to establish a core start-up team, hold introductory meetings and prepare relevant budgetary documents, and undertook his first mission to Iraq from 6 to 14 August 2018.

In this regard, and following the mission of the Special Adviser to Iraq, I have the honour to notify the Security Council that the Investigative Team will begin its work on 20 August 2018.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

18-13703 (E) 200818

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United Nations S/2018/774

Security Council

Distr.: General
22 August 2018
English
Original: Russian

Letter dated 20 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for the period 18–20 August 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Safronkov**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

18-13823 (E) 240818 240818

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Annex to the letter dated 20 August 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (18 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 27 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 13 in Ladhiqiyah, 13 in Aleppo and 1 in Idlib.

The Turkish representative office has reported three incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: one in Idlib, one in Aleppo and one in Hama.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,898 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,914.26 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to eight residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 88,174 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (19 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 25 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 14 in Ladhiqiyah, 10 in Aleppo and 1 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported three incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: one in Idlib, one in Ladhiqiyah and one in Hama.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out three humanitarian operations.

- In Huwayt, Hama Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed as humanitarian aid.
- In Aqrabah, Aleppo Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed as humanitarian aid.
- In Kawm al-Wayisiyah, Qunaytirah Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed as humanitarian aid.

In total, 1,901 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,922.66 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 226 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 88,400 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (20 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 26 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 18 in Ladhiqiyah, 5 in Aleppo and 3 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported three incidents of gunfire in Hama Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has carried out one humanitarian operation. Six hundred and fifty food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed to residents of Tabiyah, Dayr al-Zawr Governorate.

In total, 1,902 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,925.46 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to seven residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 88,407 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/775

Security Council

Distr.: General
24 August 2018
English
Original: Russian

Letter dated 22 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information bulletins from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic for 21 and 22 August 2018 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**

18-13995 (E) 270818 290818

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Annex to the letter dated 22 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (21 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The situation in the de-escalation areas has been assessed as stable.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 26 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 14 in Ladhiqiyah, 11 in Aleppo and 1 in Hama.

The Turkish representative office has reported one incident of gunfire in Idlib Governorate.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has not carried out any humanitarian operations over the past 24 hours.

In total, 1,902 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo delivered is 2,925.46 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 343 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 88,750 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

Information bulletin from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence regarding the status of implementation of the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas (22 August 2018)

Observance of the ceasefire regime

Monitoring groups have continued to monitor observance of the ceasefire regime as part of implementing the Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, signed by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 4 May 2017.

The Russian representative office of the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission reviewing issues related to violations of the ceasefire regime has reported 15 incidents of gunfire in the following Governorates: 8 in Ladhiqiyah, 6 in Aleppo and 1 in Idlib.

The Turkish representative office has not reported any incidents of gunfire.

Provision of humanitarian aid to the population of the Syrian Arab Republic

Over the past 24 hours, the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides has carried out one humanitarian operation. In Kafat, Hama Governorate, 650 food parcels with a total weight of 2.8 tons were distributed to residents.

In total, 1,903 humanitarian operations have been carried out. The total weight of humanitarian cargo is 2,928.26 tons.

Over the past 24 hours, medical assistance has been provided to 402 residents.

In total, medical assistance has been provided to 89,152 residents.

Reconciliation of opposing sides

No ceasefire agreements have been signed over the past 24 hours.

The number of populated areas that have joined the reconciliation process is 2,518.

The number of armed groups that have announced their commitment to accepting and fulfilling the terms of the ceasefire is unchanged — it is still 234.

United Nations S/2018/776

Security Council

Distr.: General
22 August 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 20 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2428 (2018), by which the Council decided to extend until 1 July 2019 the mandate of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan, as set out in paragraph 18 of Council resolution 2206 (2015) and paragraph 19 of resolution 2428 (2018).

Accordingly, I wish to inform you that, after consulting with the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan, I have appointed the following experts to serve on the Panel until 1 July 2019:

Michael Gibb (Norway), natural resources
Dean Gillespie (South Africa), arms
Andrei Kolmakov (Russian Federation), finance
Renifa Madenga (Zimbabwe), humanitarian affairs
Emilio Manfredi (Italy), armed groups/regional issues

I have designated Michael Gibb to serve as Coordinator of the Panel.

I should be grateful if you would bring this matter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

18-13820 (E) 230818

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United Nations S/2018/777

Security Council

Distr.: General
22 August 2018

Original: English

Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the fifty-fourth submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2258 (2015), paragraph 5 of resolution 2332 (2016), paragraph 6 of resolution 2393 (2017) and paragraph 12 of resolution 2401 (2018), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on data available to agencies of the United Nations system and from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other relevant sources. Data from agencies of the United Nations system on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for July 2018.

II. Major developments

Box 1

Key points: July 2018

1. Continued significant military escalation in the south-western Syrian Arab Republic resulted in the displacement of up to 325,000 people by early July. By the end of the month, 180,000 people, including some 100,000 in Qunaytirah Governorate, were estimated to remain newly displaced in affected areas. The United Nations humanitarian response drew on supplies pre-positioned through cross-border deliveries from Jordan, which remained suspended throughout the reporting period, and assistance delivered from inside the country. Nevertheless, those newly displaced in Qunaytirah remained largely cut off from that assistance.

2. Military operations in the south-west involved aerial bombardment and artillery shelling, resulting in civilian deaths and destruction of and damage to civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. Large numbers of humanitarian workers and service providers were reportedly caught up in the fighting, with many forced to flee alongside other civilians. By the end of July, government forces had reportedly taken control of the vast majority of the south-west.

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3. The humanitarian situation in the north-west continued to deteriorate, with the total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates having increased by more than 570,000 since the beginning of 2018, to a total of 4.2 million. Thousands of evacuees from the south-west were transported to Idlib, following a pattern seen earlier in the year with the arrival of close to 130,000 internally displaced persons in Idlib between March and May. In northern Aleppo Governorate, insecurity in Afrin and the areas formerly covered by Operation Euphrates Shield continued to have an impact on civilians.

4. On 16 July, an agreement was reached providing for the evacuation of the entire population of Fu'ah and Kafraya, which had been besieged by non-State armed opposition groups since March 2015. On 19 July, the population was transported on buses to the Mahalij shelter in Aleppo Governorate. The United Nations was not a party to the agreement, nor did it have access to the evacuees, but it contributed assistance in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local organizations. With the evacuation of the two villages, the United Nations no longer categorized any areas or communities in the country as besieged as at the end of the reporting period.

5. Some 147,000 civilians have returned to the city of Raqqah since the end of hostilities in October 2017, the high level of explosive hazard contamination notwithstanding.

6. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need. Humanitarian assistance provided from within the country by United Nations agencies reached more than 3.3 million people with food assistance. Four inter-agency humanitarian convoys carrying life-saving relief, food and medical supplies were deployed in July to the hard-to-reach locations of Duma in Rif Dimashq, Hulah in northern rural Homs, Harbinafsih in southern rural Hama and Bayt Jinn, Baytima, Bayt Sabir and Kafr Hawar in Rif Dimashq, reaching 133,500 people in need. In July, the United Nations delivered life-saving food assistance to close to 550,000 people through cross-border deliveries.

3. Since 24 February, when the Security Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding a cessation of hostilities, military conflict has continued in many parts of the Syrian Arab Republic. Throughout July, air strikes, artillery shelling and sniper fire were reported in the Governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, Ladhiqiyah, Dayr al-Zawr, Homs, Hama, Suwayda', Dar'a and Qunaytirah, as military operations continued between the Government and allied pro-government forces and non-State armed opposition groups. Infighting among non-State armed opposition groups was reported in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates. Sporadic clashes occurred between government forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate.

4. In the south-western Syrian Arab Republic, continued significant military escalation, including air strikes and artillery shelling accompanied by a ground offensive by the Government, supported by allied forces, resulted in deaths, injuries and the displacement of civilians, including many women and children. By the end of July, 180,000 people, including some 100,000 in Qunaytirah Governorate, were estimated to remain newly displaced in affected areas. The United Nations humanitarian response drew on supplies pre-positioned through cross-border deliveries from Jordan, which remained suspended throughout the reporting period, and assistance delivered from inside the country. Nevertheless, those newly displaced in Qunaytirah remained largely cut off from that assistance and exposed to harsh desert conditions. Numerous humanitarian workers and basic service providers were reportedly caught up in the fighting, with many forced to flee alongside other civilians.

5. By late July, government forces had reportedly taken control of the vast majority of the south-west, although active hostilities, including air strikes, continued in the Yarmouk basin area, focused on areas under the control of the Khalid ibn al-Walid Army, a group affiliated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Serious concerns persisted regarding the exposure of up to 55,000 civilians to the hostilities, as well as reports that the group was restricting the movement of civilians seeking to leave the area. Moreover, ISIL launched suicide attacks on 25 July in Suwayda' Governorate that reportedly killed more than 300 people. The group also reportedly kidnapped women and children. By the end of the reporting period, close to 9,500 civilians, including many women and children, had reportedly been evacuated from the south-west to northern governorates.

6. The humanitarian situation in the north-west continued to deteriorate, with the total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates having increased by more than 570,000 since the beginning of 2018, to a total of 4.2 million. Thousands of evacuees from the south-west were transported to Idlib, following a pattern seen earlier in the year with the arrival of close to 130,000 internally displaced persons in Idlib between March and May. In northern Aleppo Governorate, insecurity in Afrin and the areas formerly covered by Operation Euphrates Shield continued to have an impact on civilians.

7. On 16 July, an agreement was reached providing for the evacuation of the entire population of Fu'ah and Kafraya, which had been besieged by non-State armed opposition groups since March 2015. On 19 July, the population was transported on buses to the Mahalij shelter in Aleppo Governorate. The United Nations was not a party to the agreement, nor did it have access to the evacuees, but it contributed assistance in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local organizations. With the evacuation of the two villages, the United Nations no longer categorized any areas or communities in the country as besieged as at the end of the reporting period.

8. The Syrian authorities reported that 9,762 people from eastern Ghutah remained in displacement sites in Rif Dimashq. United Nations personnel were unable to reach those sites for several weeks, but continued to receive reports that men and boys between 15 and 55 years of age accounted for the majority of those remaining. On 1 July, the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered multisectoral assistance to Duma for 25,000 people, completing the convoy of 10 June for 60,000 people in need. On 26 July, United Nations agencies joined a Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy to Duma, delivering humanitarian aid, including medicines and shelter materials, which had been provided by France and transported into the country with the support of the Russian Federation. United Nations personnel also assessed health needs while in Duma. The resumption of commercial activities and basic services continued to be reported in eastern Ghutah, although access for United Nations personnel remained restricted.

9. Some 147,000 civilians have returned to the city of Raqqah since the end of hostilities in October 2017, the high level of explosive hazard contamination notwithstanding. The United Nations and its partners continued to provide assistance in the city and the broader governorate, reaching more than 530,000 people per month. In Dayr al-Zawr, there continued to be serious concern regarding an unconfirmed number of civilians trapped in ISIL-controlled areas and thus caught up in the military operations in the eastern part of the governorate. Unconfirmed reports were received of many civilian casualties in air strikes in Susah and Baghuz Fawqani on 12 July. On 30 July, it was reported that 40 critical medical cases had been evacuated from the area and that commercial trucks carrying food supplies had entered.

10. In northern Aleppo Governorate, insecurity in Afrin and the areas formerly covered by Operation Euphrates Shield continued to affect civilians. There were reports of protection concerns for the local population and violations of international humanitarian law by armed actors.

11. My Special Envoy for Syria continued his consultations focused on realizing further progress on the implementation of the final statement of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, held in Sochi, Russian Federation, in January 2018, and the establishment of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned constitutional committee, facilitated by the United Nations, within the framework of the Geneva process and in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). He chaired informal consultations with senior representatives of Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation and Turkey during the Astana-format meeting held in Sochi on 30 and 31 July and looks forward to further discussions early in September in Geneva regarding the committee. He also met representatives of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in Sochi to discuss the political process, together with other interlocutors, including representatives of the armed opposition. The delegation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sochi underlined its firm commitment to Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, in particular to helping them to exercise their right to return voluntarily and in safety and dignity. There is a collective responsibility to ensure that returns are in line with agreed-upon international standards.

12. In their joint statement at the conclusion of the Astana-format meeting in Sochi, the Astana guarantors renewed their commitment to undertaking joint efforts aimed at creating the conditions to facilitate the beginning of the constitutional committee's work in Geneva and to building confidence between the parties to the conflict. The statement also reflected the launch of discussions about the conditions necessary for the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Protection

13. Air and ground-based strikes continued to kill and injure civilians and damage and destroy civilian infrastructure. Explosive weapons continued to be fired into populated areas, killing and injuring civilians and destroying and damaging vital infrastructure. Explosive hazards in populated areas killed and injured civilians and impeded humanitarian access. The use of improvised explosive devices in some areas added to the complexity of the explosive hazard threat. The many civilian casualties and the scale of the destruction of civilian infrastructure remained a strong indication that violations were continuing of the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution and, in particular, of the prohibition on the launching of indiscriminate attacks.

14. Fighting continued to have an impact on civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, schools, markets and places of worship. According to information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), civilian casualties occurred in various governorates, possibly in violation of international humanitarian law (see annex). OHCHR has documented alleged violations committed by parties to the conflict, including government forces and their allies, non-State armed opposition groups and their allies, and Security Council-designated terrorist groups.

15. Notwithstanding the call upon the Syrian authorities by the Human Rights Council, in its resolutions S-18/1 and 19/22, to cooperate with OHCHR, including through the establishment of a field presence with the mandate to protect and promote human rights, OHCHR reporting remained limited, given that the Government had not granted it access to the country.

16. OHCHR continued to receive reports of civilians being detained by non-State armed opposition groups. In an incident on 16 July, a civilian was taken by non-State armed opposition fighters from his office in Afrin in western rural Aleppo Governorate, reportedly for not officially registering his work with the de facto authorities in control of the city.

17. In an incident on 13 July, members of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqah held 25 women who were protesting against the detention of their husbands in one of the prisons run by the group in the city. The women were held for 24 hours before being released after the intervention of tribal and community leaders. They were also accused of having ties to ISIL.

18. The reporting period was also marked by numerous incidents of the killing of civilians and of fighters who had reportedly surrendered. On 25 July, while ISIL launched coordinated suicide attacks on the city of Suwayda' that killed hundreds of people, scores of ISIL militants attacked civilians inside their homes in the eastern and north-eastern parts of the governorate. Civilians were gunned down in front of their families in at least eight villages, while at least 27 women and children were abducted from Shubayki, a village in the eastern part of the governorate. Reports indicate that the people were being used as hostages to compel the government forces and their allies to halt their offensive against ISIL in the Yarmouk basin in western Dar'a Governorate. ISIL fighters reportedly took women from a handful of houses in the village and forced them to knock on their neighbours' doors, then killing and abducting more civilians in their homes. Photographs of some of the abductees were later tweeted by ISIL, with threats to burn them alive if the Government did not cease its operations in western Dar'a Governorate and release ISIL prisoners. Many other civilians remained missing at the time of writing.

19. Reportedly, on 30 and 31 July, ISIL fighters who had surrendered and accepted a reconciliation agreement with the government forces and their allies in the Yarmouk basin were killed by pro-government forces and their allies in Dar'a. Some civilians allegedly affiliated with ISIL were also reportedly killed as the government forces and their allies advanced. The killings reportedly took place in the Yarmouk basin, including in Ma'ariyah and Kuwayyah. OHCHR received several pleas from family members in Ma'ariyah alleging that the men had been killed in front of their family members.

20. The United Nations and its health partners verified two attacks that affected health-care facilities and personnel and left a health worker dead. On 5 July, a high-explosive homemade rocket reportedly struck the Dar'a Directorate of Health building, causing material damage. On 17 July, the national hospital in Nawa was reportedly damaged as a result of the military campaign in the south-west. The hospital was separately operated by both the Directorate of Health and non-State armed groups. Its director was reportedly killed, but no casualties were reported among Directorate staff. The hospital was partially damaged and remained out of service as at the end of the reporting period.

21. Educational facilities also continued to be affected by the fighting. On 18 July, an improvised explosive device reportedly exploded near a school in Salqin, in north-eastern rural Idlib Governorate. No casualties were reported.

Humanitarian access

Box 2
Key points

1. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need. Humanitarian assistance provided from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies based in the country to regularly accessible locations in government-controlled areas reached more than 3.3 million people with food assistance through 2,270 deliveries.

2. Four inter-agency humanitarian convoys carrying life-saving relief, food and medical supplies were deployed in July to the hard-to-reach locations of Duma in Rif Dimashq, Hulah in northern rural Homs, Harbinafsih in southern rural Hama and Bayt Jinn, Baytima, Bayt Sabir and Kafr Hawar in Rif Dimashq, reaching 133,500 people in need.

3. Cross-border assistance, authorized under Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2393 (2017), remained a vital part of the humanitarian response. In July, 403 trucks (18 consignments) delivered life-saving assistance to more than 680,000 people through cross-border deliveries. Nevertheless, United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations through Jordan remained suspended during the reporting period.

4. Continued significant military escalation in the south-western Syrian Arab Republic resulted in the displacement of up to 325,000 persons by early July. By the end of the month, 180,000 people, including some 100,000 in Qunaytirah Governorate, were estimated to remain newly displaced in affected areas. The United Nations humanitarian response drew on supplies pre-positioned through cross-border deliveries from Jordan, which remained suspended throughout the reporting period, and assistance delivered from inside the country. Nevertheless, those newly displaced in Qunaytirah remained largely cut off from that assistance.

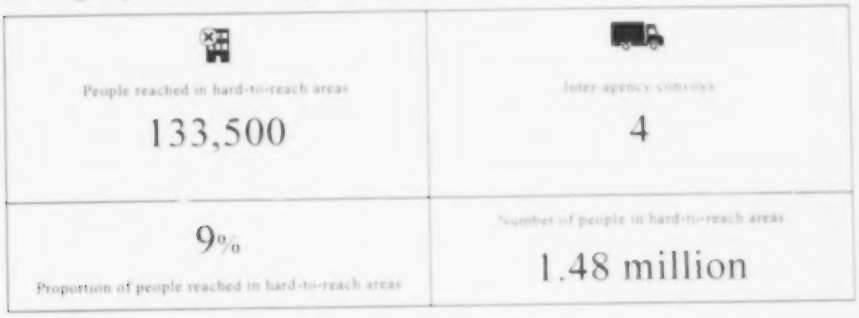
22. The United Nations estimates that, as at the end of the reporting period, some 1.48 million people were living in hard-to-reach locations in the Syrian Arab Republic. An area is considered by the United Nations to be hard to reach when it is not regularly accessible to humanitarian actors for the purposes of sustained humanitarian programming as a result of denial of access, including the need to negotiate access on an ad hoc basis, or owing to restrictions such as active conflict, multiple security checkpoints or the failure of the authorities to provide timely approval.

23. Under the United Nations inter-agency convoy plan for July and August, access was requested to 25 hard-to-reach areas, with the objective of reaching 939,300 people. In July, four inter-agency convoys were authorized to deploy to the hard-to-reach locations of Duma in Rif Dimashq, Hulah in northern rural Homs, Harbinafsih in southern rural Hama and Bayt Jinn, Baytima, Bayt Sabir and Kafr Hawar in Rif Dimashq, providing multisectoral assistance to 133,500 people (see table 1 and figure I).

Table 1
Inter-agency cross-line humanitarian convoys, July 2018

Date	*Location*	*Requested target (number of beneficiaries)*	*Number of beneficiaries reached*	*Type of assistance*
1 July	Duma	25 000	25 000	Multisectoral
15 July	Hulah	71 000	71 000	Multisectoral
15 July	Harbinafsih	18 000	18 000	Multisectoral
19 July	Bayt Jinn, Baytima, Bayt Sabir and Kafr Hawar	19 500	19 500	Multisectoral

Figure I
Inter-agency humanitarian operations, July 2018



Humanitarian response

24. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners reached millions of people in need, including women and children, through all available access routes, including: (a) humanitarian operations from within the Syrian Arab Republic, whereby humanitarian deliveries reach those in need without crossing conflict lines; (b) cross-line convoys, whereby assistance from within the country is delivered across conflict lines; and (c) cross-border deliveries, whereby assistance is provided to those in need from neighbouring countries (see tables 2 and 3). In addition to the United Nations and its partners, the Government and non-governmental organizations continued to deliver life-saving assistance to people in need. The local authorities in many areas controlled by non-State armed opposition groups also continued to provide services where possible.

25. Individual agencies continued to submit requests for single-agency deliveries. Such deliveries are undertaken by United Nations agencies based in Damascus to regularly accessible areas. In July, all 2,270 official requests submitted by the World Food Programme to the Syrian authorities to obtain facilitation letters for the transport of food assistance were approved. UNHCR submitted 43 requests for facilitation letters for the movement of core relief items and livelihood kits, all of which were approved. More than 1.4 million people were reached with multisectoral support, including 188,000 children and mothers receiving primary health-care and immunization services. In addition, an estimated 193,000 children and pregnant and lactating women were provided with nutritional supplements and services. Some 130,000 children benefited from essential learning materials and remedial education, and 209,000 children from protection and psychosocial support services. Approximately 3.3 million people received food assistance and more than 1 million people benefited from water, sanitation and hygiene services and supplies.

Table 2
People reached by the United Nations and other organizations through all modalities, July 2018

Organization	*Number of people reached*
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	30 000
International Organization for Migration	92 000
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	2 840 000
United Nations Children's Fund	1 400 000
United Nations Development Programme	840 000
United Nations Population Fund	300 000
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	132 000
World Food Programme	3 300 000
World Health Organization	760 000

26. In eastern Ghutah, the Syrian authorities reported that 9,762 people remained in displacement sites in Rif Dimashq. United Nations personnel were unable to reach those sites for several weeks, but continued to receive reports that men and boys between 15 and 55 years of age accounted for the majority of those remaining. Moreover, humanitarian access to civilians in need in eastern Ghutah remained challenging. Nevertheless, on 1 July, the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered multisectoral assistance to Duma for 25,000 people, completing the convoy of 10 June for 60,000 people in need. On 26 July, United Nations agencies were authorized to join a Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy to Duma, delivering humanitarian aid, including medicines and shelter materials, which had been provided by France and transported into the country with the support of the Russian Federation. United Nations personnel also assessed health needs while in Duma.

27. An estimated 138,800 persons remained displaced from Afrin district in the Tall Rif'at, Nubl, Zahra' and Fafin areas of Aleppo Governorate. Those displaced to Tall Rif'at and other areas have largely been accessible to humanitarian organizations operating from Aleppo. Humanitarian access to the city of Afrin from within the Syrian Arab Republic has not yet received the necessary approvals from the Syrian authorities. While the Turkish authorities provide the majority of the response in those areas, the United Nations, through its cross-border humanitarian partners, is also contributing to life-saving services and activities in the district. Particular efforts have been made in the health and food security sectors. Nevertheless, needs are considered to remain high, with most health facilities in rural areas closed, many service providers having fled the area and a large proportion of schools, markets and bakeries not yet functional, owing to explosive remnants of war and the continued absence of staff, workers and tradespeople. In particular, reports indicate that people in the area have high rates of renal problems; dedicated renal treatment has been ramped up.

28. In Raqqah Governorate, an estimated 147,000 people have returned to the city of Raqqah since the end of hostilities in October 2017. Most have settled in areas with comparatively less infrastructure damage and explosive hazard contamination. Scaling up the humanitarian response and capacity has been challenging because of the high level of contamination from mines and unexploded ordnance, which pose significant threats to returnees and humanitarian workers.

29. Cross-border deliveries continued under the terms of resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (see figure II and table 3). In line with those resolutions, the United Nations notified the Syrian authorities in

advance of each shipment, including its contents, its destination and the number of beneficiaries expected to be reached.

30. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations as authorized under resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2393 (2017). The Mechanism monitored the delivery of 18 consignments by seven United Nations agencies, consisting of 403 trucks, from three border crossings: 9 from Bab al-Hawa (341 trucks), 8 from Bab al-Salam (57 trucks) and 1 from Ya'rubiyah (5 trucks). There were no concerns or questions about the humanitarian nature of the consignments. The United Nations provided 48-hour notice to the Government regarding all shipments. Once in the country, United Nations partners ensured that the shipments arrived at the designated warehouses. Independent third-party companies contracted by the United Nations ensured independent verification of the assistance arriving at the warehouses and monitored the distribution and/or service provision. The Mechanism continued to benefit from the excellent cooperation of the Governments of Iraq, Jordan and Turkey.

31. Since cross-border operations began in July 2014, following the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014), the United Nations has conducted more than 849 cross-border consignments, with more than 21,396 trucks (14,544 through Bab al-Hawa and 2,210 through Bab al-Salam from Turkey; 4,605 through Ramtha from Jordan; and 37 through Ya'rubiyah from Iraq). Those operations complement and support the aid provided by international and Syrian non-governmental organizations that provide services to millions more from neighbouring countries.

32. Humanitarian cross-border operations through Jordan remained suspended. Nevertheless, the World Food Programme and its implementing partners delivered food assistance to more than 540,000 people from the two authorized cross-border entry points with Turkey. The World Health Organization also conducted health and medical deliveries, providing some 179,000 treatments through the cross-border mechanism. In the northern Syrian Arab Republic, the United Nations Children's Fund delivered winter kits, child protection assistance, nutrition, education, health and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies through cross-border shipments. More than 99,400 people benefited from improved access to clean water through the operation and maintenance of water and sanitation systems. Primary health-care services were provided to 86,000 people through mobile and fixed health services. Some 25,821 children under 5 years of age were reached with micronutrient supplies. Some 34,355 children under 5 years of age, in addition to pregnant and lactating mothers, were screened for acute malnutrition, and 160 of them, found to be severely malnourished, received the appropriate treatment. The United Nations also pre-positioned nutrition supplies sufficient for 150,000 beneficiaries in Idlib and rural Aleppo and is planning another round of pre-positioning there.

33. In the southern Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations have been suspended since late June. Humanitarian needs continue to grow, however, with the continued significant military escalation resulting in the displacement of up to 325,000 people by early July. By the end of the month, 180,000 people, including some 100,000 in Qunaytirah Governorate, were estimated to remain newly displaced in affected areas. The United Nations humanitarian response drew on pre-positioned supplies and assistance delivered from inside the country. Nevertheless, those newly displaced in Qunaytirah remained largely cut off from that assistance, given that cross-border deliveries from Jordan remained suspended and access to Qunaytirah from within the country was not authorized.

34. UNHCR and its partners continued to enhance the response to the protection needs of internally displaced persons, returnees and other crisis-affected populations. By the end of July, 23,272 protection interventions had been conducted, reaching

607,258 individuals, including 293,075 benefiting from general protection activities, 6,509 benefiting from child protection activities and 89,890 reached through more than 3,754 awareness-raising campaigns across 12 governorates on the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence. As at July, the total number of functioning UNHCR-funded community centres and mobile units stood at 96 community centres, 17 satellite centres and 81 mobile units, supported by 2,272 outreach volunteers. That network provided protection-related services, including community mobilization, child protection, legal aid, the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, livelihood services and services for persons with specific needs, to benefit some 2.6 million internally displaced persons, returnees, host communities and other crisis-affected people across 12 governorates. In July, 142,072 internally displaced persons in Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Suwayda', Dar'a, Qunaytirah, Tartus, Ladhiqiyah, Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Hasakah were direct beneficiaries of the UNHCR legal assistance programme, including counselling; awareness sessions on legal topics, including civil documentation and women's rights; and lawyers' direct interventions before courts and administrative bodies.

35. Moreover, the United Nations Population Fund reached some 300,000 people, carrying out activities relating to reproductive health and the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence and youth-related violence. In addition, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) distributed food parcels to some 112,000 Palestine refugees, and 8,468 Palestine refugees displaced from Yarmouk received ready-to-eat food baskets in July. A total of 22,164 individuals received cash assistance through the regular cash distribution round, and 134 Palestine refugees displaced from Yarmouk and eastern Ghutah benefited from a one-time payment of $70 per family. Moreover, according to UNRWA estimates, some 25,000 to 28,000 Palestine refugees are located in the southern Syrian Arab Republic, mainly in the city of Dar'a, Muzayrib and Jilin. UNRWA distributed ready-to-eat food baskets, hygiene kits and non-food items to some 2,300 displaced Palestine refugees in the southern Syrian Arab Republic.

Figure II

Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners by cluster through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, July 2018

(Thousands)

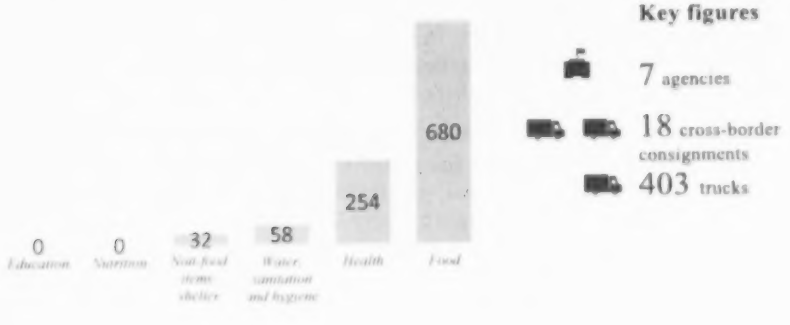


Table 3
Number of beneficiaries targeted through cross-border deliveries by sector and by district, July 2018

Governorate	*District*	*Education*	*Food*	*Health*	*Non-food items/shelter*	*Nutrition*	*Water, sanitation and hygiene*
Aleppo	Bab	–	–	2 080	4 300	–	2 500
Aleppo	I'zaz	–	83 770	212 160	2 500	–	46 250
Aleppo	Jabal Sim'an	–	42 930	–	7 695	–	–
Aleppo	Jarabulus	–	–	2 080	–	–	–
Hama	Muhradah	–	–	–	–	–	–
Hasakah	Qamishli	–	–	26 400	–	–	–
Idlib	Ariha	–	46 750	–	–	–	–
Idlib	Harim	–	338 500	5 000	–	–	3 750
Idlib	Idlib	–	49 000	6 000	17 300	–	5 000
Idlib	Jisr al-Shughur	–	480	–	–	–	–
Idlib	Ma'arrah	–	118 375	–	–	–	–

36. The Russian Federation sent informational bulletins to the United Nations from the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, in which it outlined the provision of bilateral relief assistance. Other Member States also continued to provide bilateral and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Visas and registrations

37. A total of 60 new United Nations visa requests were submitted to the Government in July. Of those, 33 were approved, 26 remained pending and 1 was cancelled by the United Nations. Of the new visa applications submitted in June, 22 were approved in July, while 5 remained pending. A total of 67 United Nations visa renewal requests were submitted in July, of which 35 were approved, 31 remained pending and 1 was rejected. An additional 48 requests for visa renewals submitted in June were approved in July. For some United Nations entities in the Syrian Arab Republic, a significant number of staff are not yet in place or cannot be replaced owing to the non-issuance of visas for months, formal requests notwithstanding.

38. A total of 24 international non-governmental organizations are registered with the Government to operate in the country.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

39. Agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system continued to implement programmes in areas affected by frequent clashes among parties to the conflict, air strikes, the regular exchange of indirect artillery fire and asymmetrical attacks. As a result of activities relating to the armed conflict, significant populated areas became highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines, which pose an elevated risk to the implementation of United Nations activities in those areas.

40. Since the beginning of the conflict, dozens of humanitarian workers have been killed, including 22 staff members of the United Nations and organizations of the United Nations system, 18 of whom were staff members of UNRWA; 66 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; and 8 staff members and

volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Many staff members of international and national non-governmental organizations have also reportedly been killed.

41. A total of 28 staff members of agencies and programmes of the United Nations system (1 staff member of the United Nations Development Programme, 1 staff member of the Department of Safety and Security and 26 UNRWA staff members) were detained or missing as at the end of the reporting period.

III. Observations

42. Intense military activity remained a worrying trend during the reporting period and I am gravely concerned about further military escalation, in particular in the north-western Syrian Arab Republic — a de-escalation area — where some 3 million Syrians continue to reside. Increased military escalation there, similar to that seen elsewhere in the country, would not only trigger further massive population movements but also have catastrophic consequences for civilians in terms of protection and access to humanitarian assistance and basic services. I urge all parties to abide by the de-escalation agreement and I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects; not to make civilian objects the target of attack and to take special care in military operations to avoid damage to buildings dedicated to education, including schools; and to respect and protect medical personnel and not to direct attacks against hospitals and other medical facilities. Civilians wishing to flee the fighting should be allowed to do so without hindrance and in full dignity and safety, while those wishing to stay must also be protected. Parties to the conflict may not order the displacement of civilians for reasons relating to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons demand it.

43. Ensuring safe, sustained, timely and unimpeded access for people in need throughout the country remains essential to avoiding a further deterioration in the humanitarian situation. However, United Nations access to areas across conflict lines and areas the control of which has recently changed remains severely limited. In areas the control of which has recently changed, access restrictions have been further challenged by the lack of basic services, as service providers have been displaced as part of local agreements reached between the Syrian authorities and non-State armed opposition groups. I remind all parties to the conflict of their obligation under international humanitarian law to respect and protect medical and humanitarian personnel and facilities. The teachers and doctors who provided essential basic services before changes in control must be protected and those whom they supported must continue to receive the essential basic services that they need. I further remind parties that the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need that is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction must be allowed and facilitated without delay.

44. I condemn in the strongest terms the callous attacks directly targeting civilians and threats against civilians, including women and children, perpetrated by ISIL in Suwayda'. Such blatant disregard for human life and dignity, contrary to the obligations of all parties engaged in armed conflict under international law, cannot be tolerated. I equally condemn reports of extrajudicial killings by pro-government forces of fighters who had laid down their arms. I remind all parties that international humanitarian law prohibits violence to the lives of persons and the taking hostage of civilians and fighters who have laid down their arms, as well as the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees that are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples. Such acts constitute serious

violations of common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and are considered war crimes and gross violations of international human rights law.

45. I reiterate that the perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable. Such a step is central to achieving sustainable peace in the Syrian Arab Republic. I also reiterate my call for the situation in the country to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

46. I also call upon all parties to the conflict, all States, civil society and the United Nations system to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in particular by providing information and documentation.

47. The UNHCR protection thresholds and parameters for refugee return remain the normative framework that must guide efforts towards Syrians returning to their homes. I will continue to draw attention to UNHCR expertise and experience stemming from more than 60 years of global operational engagement in responding to massive refugee crises. In any case, the United Nations system stands ready to assist refugees and internally displaced persons who voluntarily return to their place of origin.

48. I continue to support my Special Envoy as he pursues his careful consultations, in an accelerated manner, on the composition of the constitutional committee and the full range of issues needed to launch its proceedings. I continue to call upon Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation and Turkey, as the co-conveners of the meeting in Sochi in January 2018, and other key members of the international community to support his efforts. I also call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition to fully support those efforts as part of reaching a political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). There can be only one agenda for us all: to end the suffering of the Syrian people and to find a sustainable solution to the conflict in the country through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012.

Annex

Reported incidents affecting civilians, recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, July 2018*

Aleppo Governorate

- On 4 July, at least 1 civilian was killed and 17 others were injured when an improvised explosive device detonated close to a crowd of civilians in the town of Hayyah, in the Manbij area of eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 5 July, at least three civilians were injured when a roadside improvised explosive device detonated in the Manbij area.
- On 6 July, an improvised explosive device detonated in the vicinity of a health clinic and close to the office of the Northern Brigade, a non-State armed opposition group, in Jarabulus, north-eastern rural Aleppo. The explosion injured six civilians, including three women and a child.
- On 8 July, three civilians, including a child, were killed and six others injured when an improvised explosive device allegedly attached to a motorbike detonated in a marketplace in the town of Qabbasin, in Bab district, northern Aleppo.
- On 23 July, at around 11 a.m., an attack allegedly employing a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device occurred in the vicinity of the local council building in the town of Akhtarin, northern rural Aleppo. Two civilians were killed and at least 11 others injured.
- On 30 July, two civilians were killed and seven others injured when what were alleged to be ground-based strikes hit the Hamdaniyah neighbourhood of the government-held city of Aleppo.

Hasakah Governorate

- On 4 July, at least six civilians from the same family, including two women and a child, were killed when what was allegedly an air strike hit a residential area in Tarraf, a village held by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the Tall al-Shayir area of southern rural Hasakah.

Qunaytirah Governorate

- On 17 July, at around 10.15 a.m., at least 13 civilians, including 3 women and 10 children from two families, were killed and a woman was seriously injured when what was allegedly an air strike hit a school in the town of Ayn al-Tinah. The victims were reportedly internally displaced persons who had fled from Harah, Dar'a Governorate.

* In line with Security Council resolution 2258 (2015), the present description of incidents that are reported to have occurred during the month relates to compliance with Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) by all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. The information is provided without prejudice to the work of the Task Force on the Cessation of Hostilities of the International Syria Support Group. The reporting is not a comprehensive listing of all violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law that took place in the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period.

Suwayda' Governorate

- On 25 July, at around dawn, coordinated assaults, including with suicide attacks, hit civilian and military targets in the government-held governorate. The attacks hit a marketplace and in the vicinity of the Najmah and Mashnaqah roundabouts in the city of Suwayda'. Other areas in eastern and north-eastern rural parts of the governorate were also hit. ISIL claimed responsibility. Reports indicated that at least 220 people (both military personnel and civilians) were killed or injured, but the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights could not substantiate how many were civilians and how many military personnel.

Dar'a Governorate

- On 8 July, three civilians, including a woman and a child, were killed and four injured when what was allegedly an air strike hit the town of Om Mayadin, eastern Dar'a.
- On 17 July, four civilians, including a woman, were killed when what were alleged to be air strikes hit a residential area in the town of Aliyah, western Dar'a.
- Also on 17 July, two sibling children were killed when what were alleged to be air strikes hit the town of Tasil, in the ISIL-held Yarmouk basin area of western Dar'a.
- On 20 July, four civilians, including a woman and two children, were killed in what were alleged to be air strikes on a residential area in Tasil.
- On 31 July, at least 12 civilians were killed and 27 others injured when what were alleged to be air and ground-based strikes hit the town of Shajarah and the Kuwayyah area in the ISIL-held Yarmouk basin.

Dayr al-Zawr Governorate

- On the afternoon of 6 July, four civilians, including a woman and a child, were killed and five injured when a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device allegedly hit the office of the Syrian Democratic Forces in the town of Busayrah in eastern Dayr al-Zawr, held by the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces.
- On the evening of 12 July, an ice factory was hit by what were alleged to be air strikes in the vicinity of the Muzan intersection between the ISIL-held town of Susah and Baghuz Fawqani in the eastern rural part of the governorate. At least 28 civilians were killed.

Idlib Governorate

- On 10 July, civilians were injured in western rural Idlib in what were alleged to be air strikes in the vicinity of the Jisr al-Shughur area. A woman and two children were injured in Bashiriyah Muhambal and a civilian was injured in the village of Mishmishan, in rural Jisr al-Shughur.
- On 12 July, at around 4 p.m., a residential area in the village of Kanisat Bani Izz, in the Sahl al-Ruj area located near Jisr al-Shughur, was hit by what were alleged to be air strikes, leaving three civilians, including a woman and two children, dead and eight civilians, including five women, injured.

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Letter dated 20 August 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Further to my letter of 22 April 2018 on the reconfiguration of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) mandate and to Security Council resolution 2416 (2018), I wish to provide you with recommendations for adjusting UNISFA to the current realities on the ground so as best to serve the border communities of the Sudan and South Sudan, including in Abyei, and to support both Governments in their efforts to implement the agreements that they have signed.

The independent review of UNISFA, conducted from February to April 2018, clearly indicated that the context has markedly evolved since the initial deployment of the interim force. During the most recent consultations of the Security Council, members again unanimously agreed that, despite the lack of political progress on the final status of Abyei and on the implementation of the 2012 security arrangements and border agreements, UNISFA had clearly had a stabilizing role in Abyei and along the border between the Sudan and South Sudan. However, preoccupied with internal political tensions and conflicts, the parties have not used the relative calm on their borders to resolve outstanding issues and/or to implement existing agreements.

In line with my agenda on reforming the peace and security pillar of the United Nations, I firmly believe that we must restructure operations that no longer meet the needs on the ground and work towards achieving political resolutions to conflicts, in conjunction with, as requested by the Security Council, exit strategies for our missions. The following recommendations are aimed at addressing this requirement and repositioning the Mission to serve the renewed impetus for a political solution to the Abyei and other border disputes between the Sudan and South Sudan.

Defining an end state

Two agreements currently form the basis of the UNISFA mandate, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area of 20 June 2011 and the Agreement on the Border Monitoring Support Mission between the Government of the Sudan and the Government of South Sudan of 30 July 2011. Those agreements were intended, on the one hand, to be temporary, until a referendum was held in accordance with the Protocol on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Abyei Area of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and, on the other, to prevent any confrontation between the parties until the demarcation of the border.

Against that backdrop, UNISFA was deployed to create an environment conducive to the realization of the two agreements, thereafter integrated into the cooperation agreements of 27 September 2012. The cooperation agreements were negotiated under the auspices of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, providing a comprehensive framework to settle outstanding issues between the two countries, following the secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011.

The end state for UNISFA should therefore remain the implementation of the relevant chapters of the cooperation agreements, namely, border issues and security arrangements, as well as the settlement of the final status of Abyei, as one of the remnants of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. Its exit strategy should reflect the various steps towards this goal and define the role that the Mission should play in supporting the parties and the African Union in the realization of the agreements.

Changing realities

Since 2011, the mandate of the Mission has been focused solely on security aspects, while political support has been provided by the African Union. In the context of 2011 and 2012, this was a very useful and successful division of labour. In the years since, however, UNISFA has become exposed to the political shortcomings of the process and the insufficient political will and interest of the parties, as it had to deal with the lack of political progress in establishing the administrative arrangements in Abyei and in addressing border demarcation and security. Although well equipped and highly performing on security issues and filling the gap in local conflict resolution, the Mission has lacked the civilian tools to keep the parties engaged in the advancement of their dialogue politically, while the African Union High-level Implementation Panel focused on settling the conflict in Darfur and in the Two Areas, and the African Union Commission lacked the resources to step up its day-to-day engagement.

Similarly, the Security Council, having established UNISFA on the basis of the two interim agreements, has focused on the implementation of the temporary arrangements rather than considering the end state for UNISFA and the final status of Abyei and the settlement of the border disputes.

In order to preserve the important gains achieved by UNISFA and to contribute to the reinvigoration of the political process that was severely hampered by the conflict in South Sudan, it is now necessary for the Mission to enhance its role in support of the implementation of the agreements between the Sudan and South Sudan. This necessitates a reconfiguration of the UNISFA mandate to allow the Mission to play a more proactive and sustained role in operationalizing the agreements in support of and in collaboration with the African Union Commission and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, to achieve the demarcation of the border and the determination of the final status for Abyei.

Reconfiguring the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei

In the light of the above, I would like to propose that UNISFA continues its current focus on security and stability in the Abyei Area, as well as its monitoring and verification along the border, which has significantly contributed to the absence of confrontation and conflict between the Sudan and South Sudan since 2012. Given the evolution of the situation, however, I would like to suggest a modest expansion in its role, to foster solutions on a day-to-day basis within the framework of the signed agreement in support of both parties and the African Union/African Union High-level Implementation Panel.

This would allow the Mission to function as a tool that works towards the resolution of any border issues between the two countries, in close collaboration with other stakeholders, and to foster community dialogue and reconciliation in Abyei. In this regard, the Mission would focus on Abyei and two of the 2012 cooperation agreements on border and security arrangements. This expanded role of the Mission is differentiated from that of the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan. The role of the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan is to consider the overall negotiated settlement of outstanding Comprehensive Peace Agreement issues, and focus on seven other cooperation agreements, including agreements on oil, banking, trade, economic matters, the status of nationals and post-service benefits, as well as the Two Areas.

I reiterate my disappointment that the agreements of 20 June and 30 July 2011 remain largely unimplemented. The presence of Sudanese police in Diffra and the role of South Sudan in the Juba-appointed administration continues, in violation of the Agreement of 20 June 2011. The Mission cannot continue to be held hostage by this situation and operate in an administrative vacuum, in particular because both communities do have an administrative arrangement, albeit separate, in place. We therefore suggest that, until progress is made towards implementation of the Agreement of 20 June 2011 and a political dialogue that furthers the resolution of the final status is in place, UNISFA should be able to engage with the Juba-appointed administration based in Abyei and the Misseriya administration in Muglad, in addition to continuing its work with current community-based structures, so as to maintain stability and foster intercommunal reconciliation.

At the same time, owing to the lack of political progress, the Diffra oil installation would remain under the temporary control of Khartoum, thereby maintaining the agreed revenue-sharing structure in the Abyei Protocol until the temporary arrangements are implemented and/or a final settlement is agreed.

As for the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, the Agreement on Security Arrangements between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan of 30 July 2011 and subsequent agreements, notably the Agreement on Security Arrangements between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan of 27 September 2012, envisioned that a fully operationalized Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism would provide the parties with a temporary buffer zone on their common border that would allow the parties to peacefully negotiate contested areas. However, operations of the Mechanism have picked up momentum only within the last year owing to a modicum of rapprochement between the two countries and pressure from the Security Council to utilize the Mechanism or lose it.

To date, the Mechanism remains at initial operating capability, with only two of the four sector headquarters in operation, and only one team site established within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, while the presence of both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone continues to be reported.

As UNISFA continues to proactively push forward the operationalization of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, progress has been made towards the full functioning of the mechanism during the first months of this year, including the establishment of some team sites along the border crossing corridors within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The completion of the first phase of marking the centreline and outer limits of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone in 3 of the 10 crossing points along the agreed border corridors between the Sudan and South Sudan has also been achieved by the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, supported by UNISFA.

Despite its delays, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism remains a vital part of the framework that regulates the relationship of the two countries. Since the inclusion of the Mechanism as part of the UNISFA mandate in 2012, there has not been a single confrontation between their armies. It is therefore of paramount importance that the Mechanism be deployed fully and that the 2012 security arrangements and border agreements be implemented. The influence that the Security Council was able to exert was essential in advancing the Mechanism's effectiveness. Continued Council engagement on the matter and relations between the Sudan and South Sudan in accordance with Council resolution 2046 (2012) will be very important for the stability of the region while South Sudan is in turmoil.

For the normalization of relations between the two countries, a concerted, revitalized effort is needed to foster the implementation of the 2012 security arrangements and border agreements. In the case of UNISFA, as mentioned above, this should include a focus on the border agreement. The Mission should be mandated to support the parties in the establishment of a timetable for the border crossing corridor demarcation, in collaboration with the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, as well as provide protection for the demarcation teams, their equipment and facilities. In this regard, the Mission's operations on the border would expand, allowing it also to support border demarcation efforts, including sensitization, in addition to the security and monitoring role it plays within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.

The demarcation of the border crossing points should also be addressed as part of a wider discussion to alleviate fears that the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone will, despite all assurances, become the de facto border. Discussions on the border have to be held in parallel with the move towards full operating capability. Day-to-day engagement by the Mission with the local communities on both sides of the border will create an environment in which they have the confidence to restore their traditional ties and see the benefit thereof, and resume or expand their mutual commercial activities.

Simultaneously, and in accordance with Council resolution 2416 (2018), progress needs to be made on the disputed and claimed areas of the common border. This should commence with the handover of the required documents to the African Union Panel of Experts, followed by the finalization of the demarcation plan, which should consider starting demarcation of the non-contested border first, to show results and create a momentum for the implementation of the entire border agreement. Within the spirit of the "soft border" concept agreed in 2012, the Mission should be mandated to support demarcation teams in collaboration with the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, foster community reconciliation and sensitization and support integrated border management at the border crossings.

Changing the mission concept

In the light of the above, several changes would have to be made to the mission concept of UNISFA.

Military component

With regard to the military, a capability study was finalized by the Office of Military Affairs on 9 July 2018, which recognized the change in threat and which therefore suggested that adjustments be made to the deployment and equipment of the force. With diminishing need for a large military component in the Abyei Area, troops from the Area would be transferred to fully operationalize the monitoring mechanism, in particular ensuring the establishment of two remaining sector headquarters and required team sites within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and that each sector

headquarters has a self-sufficient dedicated force protection unit, as well as logistics support and enabling forces.

While the threat within the Abyei Area is now, thanks to UNISFA, mostly criminal in nature, there is still no political settlement which would address the underlying issues that have caused this conflict. In this context, and owing to the posture of UNISFA, the military capability study identifies cross-border military action as the most likely threat along its borders. As a result, the military component of the mission would concentrate its deployments along the borders of the Abyei Area, to safeguard against and stop any movement of armed rebel groups from both the Sudan and South Sudan. An incursion of armed entities from either party has the potential to exacerbate intercommunal tensions and endanger civilians in the Area.

In this regard, the military component of the Mission would maintain a deterrent posture along the main routes going into the Abyei Area at the northern and southern borders. With regard to the Misseriya migration, the Mission will continue to manage security with both the police and military components to facilitate cooperation between the communities.

Police component

Given the lack of unity of the administrative arrangements of the Abyei Area, including the Abyei Police Service, and our assessment of the realities set out above, the police capability study of 9 July 2018 undertaken by the Police Division underlined the continued tensions among communities due to the lack of a political settlement. The Amiet common market has become the most visible symbol of the commitment by the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities to peace and reconciliation and has provided new impetus in the relations between the communities and trade in the wider region. However, there remains a potential for friction and incidents as the two communities intermingle within the market and surrounding areas. In recent years, UNISFA and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have worked with the community-led joint peace committee to successfully de-escalate incidents at the Amiet market by facilitating timely intercommunal dialogue.

In addition, with the adverse economic situation in South Sudan, the Amiet market has become a significant economic hub. However, this success has also increased criminality in the Abyei Area, including murders, cattle rustling, carjacking and assault, as well as intermittent public disorder and spontaneous shooting incidents. In the light of this rise in criminal activity, I recommend the deployment of three formed police units to the three major population centres in the Abyei Area, namely, the Amiet common market, Abyei town and Agok, as these units are better designed, trained and equipped to respond to law and order issues than the military. The latter two would also be positioned for emergency deployment to flashpoints within the area of operations. This would allow the Mission to enhance its focus on maintaining law and order, including justice and corrections and furthering peace between the communities.

In the absence of progress on the Abyei Police Service, specialized individual police officers would reinforce their support of the community protection committees, with deployments to all team sites in the Abyei Area. Further, in addition to its work with the community protection committees, outreach should be undertaken by the mission to support the Misseriya in establishing an unarmed migration police force that would accompany nomads, as well as liaise with the resident Misseriya community in the Abyei Area to identify support needed on law and order issues.

Specialized individual police officers providing advisory support on integrated border management issues should be deployed to all 10 team sites along the border

crossing corridors. Here, the individual police officers would work to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies of both countries on integrated border management and control of illicit arms and goods movement, monitoring and reporting on transnational/cross-border crimes. Total police numbers would therefore be at 640, with three formed police units at 160 each, 148 individual police officers and a headquarters staff of 12.

Uniformed personnel ceiling

The reconfiguration accommodates the proposed changes within the current uniformed personnel ceiling of 4,550. Given that the mission is at initial operating capability and the aim of the proposal is for full operating capability of the Mechanism, this represents a net reduction of 607 in the Abyei Area. In addition, the transfer of some tasks from the military to an augmented police component represents another reduction of 590 military. Troop figures in the Abyei Area would therefore reduce by 1,197, or 30.2 per cent, from the currently authorized 3,959 to 2,762.

Civilian component

In order to undertake the additional tasks stated above, the Mission should review its support capabilities and slightly reinforce and reconfigure its civilian capacity. In this regard, UNISFA should create a strong link with the African Union High-level Implementation Panel to follow up on commitments and help organize and support meetings essential for political progress. UNISFA would still be led by a General of the Ethiopian Armed Forces at the Assistant Secretary-General level, who would function as Head of Mission and Force Commander.

A civilian Deputy Head of Mission at the D-2 level would function as the main focal point on community liaison in Abyei with both traditional leaders and the existing administrative structures in Abyei and Muglad, as well as for day-to-day follow-up on commitments towards the implementation of signed agreements and support for humanitarian partners and for the African Union in its efforts to bring about a political settlement. In this regard, the civilian capacity would be reinforced with one international staff member in Khartoum and one in Juba to follow up in the capitals and keep Mission leadership abreast of developments that are relevant to its mandate. Team sites in the Abyei Area would also have community liaison officers, both international and national, in pursuit of conflict resolution and prevention. Small teams of international and national civilian officers would be attached to the four monitoring mechanism sector headquarters in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, to facilitate the work of the African Union and contribute to the sensitization of communities in the border area.

Peace and development nexus

To alleviate conflict triggers over resources, and to foster the important link between and mutually reinforcing role of the security and political work of the peacekeeping mission and the recovery and development of the United Nations country team, I would like to suggest a dedicated programme for both communities, Ngok Dinka and Misseriya. In the case of the latter, the Sudan United Nations country team should engage with the Government and the Misseriya leadership outside the Abyei Area and ensure that the Misseriya community as a whole benefits from development efforts.

I call upon donors in the Sudan and South Sudan to finance such projects tailored to the needs of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya that focus on reconciliation and development, taking into account the unique and distinct needs of both communities. Such country team-run projects would greatly alleviate the burden on UNISFA, which

has struggled to meet the expectations of the populations, not having the mandate for any such activities. UNISFA will meanwhile continue to provide operational and logistical support to the humanitarian community in the Abyei Area and preserve sufficient capacity to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel.

UNISFA is one of the best performing peacekeeping missions. This is due to the commitment and dedication of its staff and the support of the Government of Ethiopia. We should not, however, mistake the success of keeping relative calm in Abyei and the border for a sign that the issues have been resolved and that UNISFA can therefore leave or be substantially reduced. Rather, the Mission needs to be adjusted to the realities on the ground, where the underlying political issues are not resolved. I appeal to you to sustain the investment in UNISFA so as to not jeopardize hard-won gains towards peace over the last seven years. UNISFA can and should remain a vehicle for building confidence-building between the two countries until they manage to settle the final status of Abyei and to determine their common border.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**